



Security Council

Seventy-second year

Provisional

7931st meeting

Thursday, 27 April 2017, 10 a.m.

New York

President: Mrs. Haley (United States of America)

Members:

Bolivia (Plurinational State of)	Mr. Inchauste Jordán
China	Mr. Zhang Dianbin
Egypt	Mr. Aboulatta
Ethiopia	Ms. Guadey
France	Mr. Delattre
Italy	Mr. Cardì
Japan	Mr. Bessho
Kazakhstan	Mr. Sadykov
Russian Federation	Mr. Iliichev
Senegal	Mr. Ciss
Sweden	Mr. Skau
Ukraine	Mr. Yelchenko
United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland ..	Mr. Rycroft
Uruguay	Mr. Bermúdez

Agenda

The situation in the Middle East

Report of the Secretary-General on the implementation of Security Council resolutions 2139 (2014), 2165 (2014), 2191 (2014), 2258 (2015) and 2332 (2016) (S.2017/339)

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17-11403 (E)



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The meeting was called to order at 10.05 a.m.

Adoption of the agenda

The agenda was adopted.

The situation in the Middle East

Report of the Secretary-General on the implementation of Security Council resolutions 2139 (2014), 2165 (2014), 2191 (2014), 2258 (2015) and 2332 (2016) (S/2017/339)

The President: In accordance with rule 39 of the Council's provisional rules of procedure, I invite Mr. Stephen O'Brien, Under-Secretary-General for Humanitarian Affairs and Emergency Relief Coordinator, to participate in this meeting.

Mr. O'Brien is joining today's meeting via video-teleconference from Geneva.

The Security Council will now begin its consideration of the item on its agenda.

I wish to draw the attention of Council members to document S/2017/339, which contains the report of the Secretary-General on the implementation of Security Council resolutions 2139 (2014), 2165 (2014), 2191 (2014), 2258 (2015) and 2332 (2016).

I now give the floor to Mr. O'Brien.

Mr. O'Brien: On 15 April, the exhausted, oppressed people of Syria suffered yet another horrendous attack. Scared and starved, men, women and children from the towns of Fo'ah and Kefraya were targeted by a car bomb while stuck at a checkpoint in Rashidin. There were 67 children among the 125 dead — such a terrible price for those already robbed of so much.

Yet I do not raise the incident solely because of the loss of life or depravity of the attackers. Rather, it was the unity of the humanitarian response to the attack that ought also to be in the headlines. Humanitarians from all directions rushed in to save lives. Syrian Arab Red Crescent workers, first responders, medical staff of non-governmental organizations (NGOs) and some 15 Syrian NGOs, along with countless civilians, bound together to aid survivors as best they could. Out of a deplorable terrorist act arose a testament to the strength of the Syrian spirit — of ordinary civilian Syrians coming together to help others, regardless of their background.

All too sadly, such glimmers of humanity, acts that we see everyday at a local level across Syria, are overshadowed by the sheer number and ferocity of attacks on civilians and civilian infrastructure, such as hospitals, schools and markets. The past months have seen fighting continue to intensify on numerous fronts. The Secretary-General has said time and again that there will be no military end to this conflict. Yet, military might continues to be used against civilians in a way that defies all reason, let alone morality or law. The use of abhorrent chemical weapons on 4 April in Khan Shaykhun was yet another horrific account of such brutality. I wish I could say it was mindless brutality — but no, it was deliberate, planned, predetermined by other humans against their own fellow human beings, sheer unbridled cruelty by leaders and commanders and we await the investigation to confirm which ones.

Just a few days ago, two more hospitals were rendered inoperable after reported air strikes that also led to the deaths and injury of civilians, including children. At least six hospitals and three schools have reportedly been impacted in April alone. I echo the call of our humanitarian coordinators that attacks against medical facilities are completely unacceptable and must stop. What purpose can the use of such military tactics bring? Certainly, they do not bring peace or any benefit to any Syrian. These gross tactics will cause only further human suffering, human suffering borne primarily by the civilian population — and for which perpetrators must, and on this we are determined, be held to account — if not now, in the nearest future possible.

Beyond these attacks that have so shocked the world, as I said to the Council last month (see S/PV.7909), I am also gravely concerned about the situation in besieged eastern Ghouta, outside Damascus, where civilians remain trapped amid reports of relentless shelling, air strikes and ground fighting. The last informal access routes have reportedly been closed, further restricting movement for some 400,000 people who live in the area, and whom the United Nations has been unable to access since October last year. Increased fighting has also resulted in displacement in northern Hama, where some 20,000 people have been displaced in recent days. In Idlib, air strikes and shelling continue to kill civilians and damage civilian infrastructure. Just this week, a medical facility in Shinan village was reportedly struck by air strikes, and in Khan Shaykhun, where the chemical attack occurred earlier in the

month, its market was taken out by aerial bombardment that resulted in the deaths of seven civilians, including a child, and the wounding of 30 more.

In Raqqa, ongoing fighting has also led to deaths, injury and displacement. Some 39,000 newly displaced people fled fighting to join the tens of thousands already in camps outside Raqqa city, and more arrive every day. The situation for those in the camps is extremely difficult, with four out of five people lacking appropriate shelter, and there are now reports of the deaths of several children due to a lack of medical care. The United Nations and our NGO partners are responding from Qamishli, and there are plans to scale up the response in the coming days.

While insecurity causes the humanitarian situation to deteriorate for hundreds of thousands, access to provide them with life-saving support is challenged at every turn. I am concerned by the rise — I repeat rise — in administrative and other bureaucratic restrictions imposed by all parties. For example, in the north-east of Syria, requirements for humanitarians to register with local authorities have been in place since March; these include provisions regarding NGO recruitment policies and interference with procurement processes, among others. Furthermore, since 4 April local authorities have attempted to direct where assistance could be delivered. Such directing of assistance is contrary to the humanitarian principles. These wrongful attempted coercions have resulted in a pause in United Nations operations in Hasakah governorate, affecting nearly 100,000 people. In Idlib, similar restrictions — such as new registration demands and requests for information on and interference in the staffing, logistics and finances of NGOs — only penalize those most in need.

I will not repeat again the bureaucratic delaying tactics used by the Government of Syria to thwart humanitarian assistance at every turn, beyond saying that they continue to bring untold human suffering. As a result of these tactics and the ongoing insecurity, levels of access for inter-agency cross-line convoys are no greater than they were at this time last year. Only four convoys have deployed so far under the new two-monthly April-May plan, reaching 157,500 people. None of those convoys reached besieged areas due to a lack of necessary authorizations. In fact, the only besieged people reached this year by land were the 6,000 trapped in Khan al-Shih and the 60,000 in the four towns of Madaya, Zabadani, Fo'ah and Kefraya, who were

accessed separately through the objectionable, tit-for-tat four towns agreement. Deir ez-Zor, besieged by the Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant, continues to be reached by airdrops. I have said publicly that the failure to deliver is a stain on not just the parties to the conflict, but also on those in the international community, including the Security Council, as well as the members of the humanitarian task force of the International Syria Support Group, who have committed themselves to exercising their influence to improve humanitarian access, particularly to besieged areas.

Despite this challenge, the United Nations and humanitarian partners continue to relentlessly negotiate access, as we have always done and wherever it is possible. Real progress is needed now to stymie the tide of death and suffering inflicted on people day after day, month after month. For many, it is already too late. Inaction has played a part in material changes to the humanitarian landscape. As the noose has tightened around eastern Ghouta, some 30,000 people in the adjacent areas of Barza and Qabun have also come under siege by the Government of Syria.

Significantly, however, we continue to see an overall reduction in the number of people besieged due to the starve-and-surrender tactics used primarily by the Government of Syria. Among others, thousands of people in Wadi Barada, Khan al-Shih, Al-Waer in Homs city, and in the four towns referred to earlier have now been displaced as part of local agreements, which followed years of besiegement and intense air strikes, shelling and sniping. Khan al-Shih and Zabadani have now been removed from the list of besieged locations. In fact, Zabadani is now devoid of its civilian population. As a result of these changes, the number of people in besieged areas now stands at just over 620,000.

Although the overall number of those besieged is falling, this process of evacuation must not be misconstrued as a positive development. These evacuations are not in line with humanitarian principles and are not conducted in consultation with the people. Let us not pretend that those who evacuate move to a location of safety. Many of those who displace to Idlib or northern Aleppo continue to live in areas where civilian structures, including hospitals, come under regular aerial bombardment, and their access to basic goods such as food and shelter is limited. These civilians may no longer be besieged, but they have been forced to leave their homes and they continue to suffer.

Given the shifting front lines, all routes need to remain open to allow people safe passage and for aid to reach people in need throughout Syria through the most direct routes via the brave humanitarian aid workers. We have seen innovations of necessity successfully implemented through air drops to Deir ez-Zor and the air bridge to Qamishli. Now, with needs increasing in north-east Syria and more traditional routes inaccessible, an increasing number of United Nations partners are looking for alternatives. The number of international NGOs operating out of north-east Syria has nearly quadrupled in the past year and is expected to grow further as needs continue to outstrip the assistance being provided. A land route from Aleppo to Qamishli to provide support to Raqqah is also being negotiated and explored.

I am sad to say that the humanitarian situation is deteriorating, if that were possible, and the need for the active engagement of members of the Council is urgent. The core needs of the Syrian people from the international community in general, and from those Member States seated in the Council in particular, remain largely unchanged. They include a consolidation of the nationwide ceasefire, and in particular a pause in fighting in eastern Ghouta, to enable the delivery of aid; the protection of civilians and civilian infrastructure by all parties to the conflict; and the lifting of arbitrary and bureaucratic impediments by all parties throughout Syria.

It is imperative that no country or group prevent people from moving in safety or humanitarian organizations from accessing people in need wherever they are in Syria. A step change in access to besieged and hard-to-reach locations is needed in order to ensure full implementation of United Nations inter-agency convoy plans, and to ensure delivery on the basis of humanitarian needs assessments. There must also be an end to the removal of medical items from convoys, and immediate, unimpeded and sustained access to all in need throughout Syria. In particular, there must be an immediate lifting of all sieges.

Finally, there must be a political solution to the conflict, in accordance with resolution 2254 (2015) and the Geneva communiqué (S/2012/522, annex). As long as military tactics are prioritized over political, there can be no lasting peace, and it will be the civilian population that is exposed to further needless suffering as a result. I also wish to say that we need action now, because now it is already too late for the more than

250,000 Syrians who have died over the course of this atrocious war. I would therefore tell the members of the Security Council that it is action today that is going to count.

The President: I thank Mr. O'Brien for his briefing and tell him how much we appreciate his reporting. I think it is very insightful and will certainly help us going forward.

I shall now give the floor to those Council members who wish to make statements.

Mr. Bessho (Japan): I thank Mr. O'Brien for his briefing.

We have heard many times that the situation in Syria cannot get any worse, yet this tragic crisis continues. Thirteen and a half million people need humanitarian assistance. Even the so-called improved access in March allowed aid convoys to reach only 39 per cent of people for whom access was requested. There has been some progress on the hard-to-reach areas since the 12 February agreement between the Syrian Higher Relief Committee and the United Nations, but the situation in the besieged areas is still devastating. And we can only imagine the horror of the evacuees on 15 April who finally exited their besieged towns only for their convoy to be brutally targeted in Al-Rashidin.

The many victims of the tragedy in Syria include not only ordinary civilians, but also the people who are trying to help them. Nearly one year has passed since the adoption of resolution 2286 (2016), which called for the protection of medical staff, yet countless medical personnel and humanitarian workers are still being killed in Syria. I would like to take this opportunity to express our sorrow and gratitude to them and to pay our respect to the brave men and women who continue to work for those in need, under the most severe of circumstances.

The Council and the International Syria Support Group Humanitarian Taskforce have been making strenuous efforts to achieve rapid, safe and unhindered access throughout Syria, as mandated by resolution 2254 (2015). Our attention has been extensive, but any progress is often hard-won. Over the past year, we have worked to identify concrete measures, obstacles and areas to be reached. Yet we have constantly encountered bureaucratic impediments and unreasonably delayed clearances from the Syrian Government. Every inter-agency convoy's departure

or potential cancellation is a subject of worry, and every item is potentially at risk of being removed from convoys. Furthermore, it is clear that facilitation letters issued by the Syrian Government are crucial. It is tragic and unbelievable that one bureaucratic document can be so critical for access to thousands of people. The humanitarian co-penholders — Egypt, Sweden and Japan — have discussed this matter directly with the Permanent Mission of Syria in New York. We urged Syria to make more efforts to issue letters immediately, in line with the United Nations call for them to be issued within two to three days. We believe that the Syrian Mission conveyed our joint message to Damascus. The co-penholders will try to achieve as much as possible in this area.

One of our most urgent concerns at present is eastern Ghouta. Mr. O'Brien explained that the United Nations is requesting a cessation of hostilities to allow humanitarian access. Japan supports that call. But the need for a ceasefire is not limited to eastern Ghouta. We are also concerned about the many reports of fighting in various locations. The next Astana process meeting, to be held at the beginning of May, will be crucial to preserving the ceasefire mechanism, which allows for humanitarian access.

While the details and logistics I have mentioned are vitally important for Syria, we should also keep two broader goals in mind.

The first is the importance of the political process. Although the recent Geneva talks did not yield a breakthrough, there was also no breakdown. That is an implicit affirmation of the fact that there is no military solution to the conflict. We must act on that progress to gain commitments that translate into lifesaving changes on the ground.

The second broad point is the need for truth and accountability. We have seen so much destruction and so many crimes during this six-year war, in particular the use of chemical weapons. Justice may not come immediately, but the United Nations and other humanitarian actors must use their various tools, including those granted by the Security Council, to ascertain facts on the ground. Those facts will form the basis for accountability and for addressing the suffering of the Syrian people.

With those two broader goals in mind, we must continue our efforts unabated to achieve good-faith

cooperation and humanitarian access from the Syrian Government in order to serve those most in need.

Mr. Skau (Sweden): I thank Under-Secretary-General O'Brien for his comprehensive briefing today. Every month he returns to the Security Council to report on the humanitarian situation in Syria. Every month the situation becomes more acute. The number of people driven from their homes increases. The number not knowing where their next meal will come from grows. And the number of people maimed or killed grows.

We have heard from Mr. O'Brien again today about the worsening plight of the Syrian people: over 6 million people brutalized, displaced and trapped in Syria in need of humanitarian assistance, and 5 million people wrenched from their homes and their loved ones to seek refuge in the region and beyond — if they survive the journey. Now they are waiting — in besieged towns and villages and in refugee camps in Jordan, Lebanon and Turkey — waiting for the assistance they need, waiting for the war to end and waiting for the moment when they can begin to rebuild their lives.

Unfortunately, it seems unlikely that their wait will end soon. As we have heard today, rather than decreasing, there is increased militarization and violence on the ground, leading to large numbers of civilian casualties and more internal displacement. It seems that humanitarian considerations are wholly subordinate to military objectives. There continues to be a complete disregard for the laws of war and obligations to protect civilians. Cynical military tactics that blatantly violate international humanitarian law by deliberately targeting civilians are being used to gain military advantage, in particular by Government forces. The upcoming Astana meeting on 3 May offers an opportunity for the ceasefire guarantors to make progress on de-escalation. We expect that they will take that opportunity to deliver. A failure to do so also threatens progress in the upcoming United Nations-led talks in Geneva.

While emphasizing that the Syrian regime and its allies bear the responsibility for the overwhelming majority of violations of international humanitarian law in Syria, we also note that recent airstrikes on Raqqa allegedly led to civilian casualties and struck civilian infrastructure. That compounds the suffering of the people in Raqqa, who are already the victims of senseless torture and murder at the hands of Da'esh. We

urge the international coalition against Da'esh to take greater care in order to protect civilians in Syria.

The reality for many of those who have been forced to live under siege for years is that, when the opportunity does arise to leave, they are cruelly moved to areas scarcely more safe or stable than those they left. The United Nations has repeatedly expressed concern about local agreements preceded by besiegement, starvation and bombardment, and resulting in the forced displacement of civilians. That tactic of bombing and laying siege so as to enable so-called local agreements must stop. We recall the warning from the Secretary-General that, under international humanitarian law, forced displacement may constitute a war crime. We reiterate his call that any evacuation of civilians must be safe, voluntary and to a place of their choosing. We urge parties to ensure the full compliance of any new local agreements with international humanitarian law. We encourage the United Nations, other relevant organizations, and Member States with influence to intensify dialogue with parties and actors, primarily the Government of Syria and Russia.

We understand the predicament that local agreements present for the United Nations and other humanitarian agencies. They are not informed of the terms, have no access, and the security situation limits the possibility to be present during subsequent relocations. However, we must make every effort to avoid another catastrophe like the one in Al-Rashidin. Until the fighting stops, we must continue to explore options for increasing civilian safety by using cameras or other tools as a form of protective vigilance, for example.

The deplorable situation for those relocated to Idlib is of grave concern. Regime air strikes on hospitals and schools in Idlib must stop. Civilians must be protected and humanitarian access must be granted. We call on those with influence over armed groups in Idlib, including Turkey, to use their influence to counter restrictions on the ability of humanitarian agencies and non-governmental organizations to do their work. Until the situation improves, we might all want to advocate alternative destinations for civilians, ones with better protection and access. We encourage the United Nations to inform the Council in its next report about the situation in Jarabulus, which is another main destination area.

We want to take this opportunity to express our strong support and admiration for the tireless efforts of the United Nations and other humanitarian organizations to deliver assistance to populations in need in an extremely challenging context. They continue to encounter unacceptable obstructions and barriers to the access they need on a daily basis.

We renew our call on the Syrian regime to grant safe, unimpeded and sustained humanitarian access to all those in need of assistance, including in locations subject to local agreements. Access is a question of political will. In many cases, a binary choice exists between agreeing to provide lifesaving aid to women and men, boys and girls, or not to do so. We fully support Japan's call, on behalf of the penholders, on the Syrian authorities to implement the simplified approval process of the United Nations.

Let me underline our deep concern about the deteriorating situation in eastern Ghouta, which we also raised with the Syrian Permanent Mission earlier this week. We invite Council members to join us in calling for a pause in the fighting so as to allow humanitarian agencies to reach all in need through the routes they prefer to use, as has been requested by the United Nations since October. In addition to the well-known access constraints, particularly to areas besieged by the Government of Syria, we are also increasingly worried about new access restrictions such as those now being imposed in Idlib and by local authorities in Kurdish-controlled areas.

Every additional day that the people of Syria wait for assistance and an end to the conflict is an indication of the failure of the international community and of the Council to show the courage to take the tough decisions necessary to put humanitarian needs above political considerations; of our failure to live up to our responsibility to protect the people of Syria by ensuring a ceasefire and respect for international humanitarian law; of our failure to deliver a peaceful end to the suffering for the people of Syria. How much longer must they wait? For many, including thousands of children, their dreams for the future are already shattered; the least we can do is give them the support they need to end the nightmare they are living today.

Mr. Aboulatta (Egypt) (*spoke in Arabic*): The Security Council is holding monthly meetings on the situation in Syria to reaffirm members' positions vis-à-vis the unprecedented suffering of the Syrian

people. We reiterate our words of condemnation and regret to the media and our peoples. We have grown used to it; the Syrian people has grown used to it; it has become a part of the traditional practice that has started to affect our outlook and our real engagement with an interactive dialogue that seeks a common ground to build upon to support a serious effort towards a settlement.

It is important to give ourselves the opportunity to review what the Security Council has achieved in the past few months so that we can objectively judge the approach it has adopted. Let us recall that these meetings and their outcomes over these months have not contributed to supporting the ceasefire. They have brought no real pressure to bear on the parties to engage in direct and serious political negotiations. They did not even prevent the two horrific incidents that took place this month — the first in Khan Shaykhun on 4 April and the second, a terrorist explosion in the Al-Rashidin neighbourhood on 15 April — claiming the lives of more innocent men, women and children, in addition to the hundreds of thousands who have lost their lives during the past six years.

Reviewing the Security Council's approach to the situation in Syria and its impact on the reality on the ground has become an urgent matter. We have warned, time and again that the Council cannot become a media outlet. The impact of its statements must go beyond making newspaper headlines. It is evident that with the heightened level of discord, the work of the Council is moving steadily towards that fate. If in a crisis of this magnitude, we cannot find a modicum of common ground to confront it, what must happen before we make the necessary effort to overcome the current state of polarization and opposing narrow interests?

I would like to thank Mr. O'Brien for his focused and clear briefing today. We reiterate our support for the humanitarian efforts of the United Nations. We are ready to support any effort to alleviate the suffering of civilians in any Syrian town, be it by facilitating access to humanitarian assistance or the evacuation of the sick and injured. We urge the parties concerned to facilitate the mission of the Organization and to work to remove any impediment.

I would like to express our deep regret that the briefing, as expected, reflected the continued human suffering in Syria. It was no different than previous briefings, except in some details, locations and numbers.

The practices have not changed; the impediments remain. The factors that continue to fuel the crisis have not changed and will not change if international, regional and internal parties continue to seek any excuse to prevaricate or if the Security Council continues to reflect points of divergence rather than commonalities or to focus on details without looking at the full picture. I therefore call on all parties to support the efforts of the Secretary-General through the United Nations Special Envoy for Syria, Mr. De Mistura, to reach an agreement on starting a transitional period that meets the aspirations of the Syrian people by establishing democracy and freedoms in a unified sovereign country, in accordance with the Geneva communiqué (S/2012/522, annex) and resolution 2254 (2015).

I also reiterate our call on all parties to engage in a serious manner to counter terrorism and the spread of terrorist groups in Syria and to confront the phenomenon of armed groups and militia that are not governed by any reason or law and that continue to receive covert support in the form of weapons and funds without their sponsors being held accountable for those practices. The funding and sponsoring of terrorism in an organized and systematic way in Syria and other countries in the region are not a figment of our imagination; they are a fact. They pose a threat to countries in the region and are being watched by the countries of the region and throughout the wider world. Those countries will continue to endure that threat if some continue to bury their heads in the sand.

There is still some common ground among the members of the Security Council that can be built upon if there is a serious will to do so. We are committed to a frank dialogue on the Syrian crisis that is free of polarization. We remain mindful of the centrality and importance of cooperation between the co-chairs of the International Syria Support Group — the United States and the Russian Federation — as it pertains to Syria at the political level and on the ground. We also believe that Council documents, the statements of the Support Group and any previous consensus reached could be a foundation that we can build upon to assist in revitalizing the work of the International Syria Support Group. We are fully prepared to support any efforts in that regard.

The challenges of the crisis and its repercussions on the region and the world loom large, and no country can address them alone. The saboteurs of the political process in Syria — Special Envoy Mr. De Mistura has

mentioned them time and again — will seek to exploit the divisions in the Council and among international parties, continue to fuel the situation on the ground, defeat any attempt at a political settlement and ensure that the proxy war continues.

Mr. Rycroft (United Kingdom): I thank Mr. O'Brien for his important briefing today and for all of his sterling work.

I would like to begin as Mr. O'Brien did by wholeheartedly condemning the terrorist attack on desperate civilians as they were being evacuated as part of the four towns agreement. It is utterly tragic that over 120 people, including a very high number of children, were brutally killed. The United Kingdom condemns that terrible attack. We will work to ensure that whoever is responsible is held to account.

I also wish to salute the unity and bravery of the humanitarian response, including the response of the White Helmets. Despite a ceasefire being in place since the end of 2016, we continue to witness terrible ongoing violence. In April alone, we know that the regime or its allies have carried out aerial attacks on at least six hospitals and three schools in Syria — I repeat, six hospitals and three schools. That is utterly deplorable. I hope that others will join me in condemning all such incidents. All of us need to do everything in our power to bring the suffering to an end. I therefore ask my Russian colleague: What is Russia doing with its leverage to ensure that the regime stops attacking schools and hospitals?

Once again, such attacks bring into laser focus the urgent and desperate humanitarian needs of 13 million people in Syria. I am especially concerned about the difficulty in reaching the 1.5 million people who live under siege-like conditions and the further 3.2 million in other hard-to-reach areas in Syria. All of them urgently require food, water and medicine. Roughly 5 million Syrians live in besieged and hard-to-reach areas, but the only regime-besieged area to be reached in 2017 was Khan al-Shih where 6,000 people were reached with aid. The other besieged areas reached are Deir ez-Zor, besieged by Da'esh, where the United Nations carries out air drops and the four towns besieged by the Iranian-backed Hizbullah and armed opposition groups. That is a tiny proportion of aid reaching those people who are in most need of it.

Let me be clear — the Syrian regime is using starve-or-surrender tactics. That is abhorrent and a

clear breach of international humanitarian law. I am especially concerned about the 420,000 innocent civilians in the besieged part of eastern Ghouta, where supplies are rapidly running out. There are urgent medical needs, shortages of basic food items and no water or power supplies. I finally support Mr. O'Brien's call for a pause in fighting to allow the United Nations and its humanitarian partners to safely enter eastern Ghouta.

At the International Syria Support Group meeting in Geneva on 20 April, Russia committed to pressing the regime to allow the United Nations and its humanitarian partners to access Duma, one part of eastern Ghouta. What is the situation one week later? The regime has not acted. There is still no convoy. We owe it to the people of Duma to do everything we can to improve the situation. The United Nations has received the requisite assurances from the relevant armed opposition groups to allow them to deliver assistance to Duma and it has identified a safe route to enter. The only things now lacking are for the Al-Assad regime to issue a facilitation letter and to pause its aerial bombardment of the area for long enough for the United Nations and its humanitarian partners to enter. If Russia is unable to ensure that the regime allows access, we call on the Security Council to act to ensure that the United Nations is able to deliver urgent supplies to Duma, in the first instance.

I will reiterate now what I have said many times before. There can be no sustainable peace until there is a political transition. The Al-Assad regime bears overwhelming responsibility for the suffering of the Syrian people. I implore the whole of the Security Council to work in unity to end the conflict for the sake of the Syrian people.

Mr. Ciss (Senegal) (*spoke in French*): First and foremost, I would like to thank Mr. Stephen O'Brien for his excellent briefing and tireless efforts. Through him, I would like to pay tribute once again to the medical and humanitarian personnel for the sacrifices they make for the Syrian people, who are sorely tested at this time.

Senegal remains deeply concerned about the devastating impact of the Syrian conflict. My delegation would therefore like to reiterate its firm condemnation of the terrorist attack that occurred on 15 April in Al-Rashidin, in western Aleppo, during the evacuation of Fo'ah and Kefraya. That attack, which was denounced by the Security Council, killed 130 people, including 67

children and left hundreds injured. We believe that this is yet another reason for giving as much priority as is required to combating terrorism and violent extremism, in particular the fight against Da'esh and the former Al-Nusra Front, by employing a comprehensive strategy that respects international humanitarian law and relevant Security Council resolutions.

The conflict also highlights the suffering of Syrian children, in particular the fate of 2.4 million who left their homes and another 280,000 who still live in besieged areas. Their plight therefore deserves our concerted attention.

In that regard, we reiterate the call made by the Committee on the Rights of the Child for an investigation of crimes against children, including through active collaboration with existing mechanisms, such as the Organization for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons (OPCW) Fact-Finding Mission in Syria, the United Nations-OPCW Joint Investigative Mechanism and the Independent International Commission of Inquiry on the Syrian Arab Republic, as well as the International, Impartial and Independent Mechanism to Assist in the Investigation and Prosecution of Those Responsible for the Most Serious Crimes under International Law Committed in the Syrian Arab Republic since March 2011, pursuant to General Assembly resolution 71/248. My delegation accordingly renews its encouragement to the Organization for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons, in particular its Fact-Finding Mission, in its efforts to shed light on the chemical-weapons attack in Khan Shaykhun so as to bring to justice the perpetrators of that despicable act, which resulted in many child casualties among the victims.

Despite ongoing efforts, the cessation of hostilities facilitated by Russia, Turkey and Iran — which we welcome as part of the Astana process and once again gave us cause for hope and optimism — has been seriously put in question owing to the violence observed throughout the country. Consequently, communities such as Aleppo, Hama, Dar'a, Raqqa and Damascus continue to record many civilian casualties and the continued destruction of public infrastructure, such as schools, health facilities and markets, all of which is in violation of international humanitarian law.

The situation in eastern Ghouta, where approximately 400,000 people are besieged, remains of particular concern. According to the World Health Organization, the three public hospitals and the 17 health centres in

the locality are no longer functioning or accessible to the population. Furthermore, the last United Nations humanitarian convoy to reach that region was on 29 October 2016.

Nevertheless, despite extremely difficult conditions, the United Nations and its partners have continued to provide support to those in need among the population. In that regard, my delegation commends the hardly negligible progress made in late March involving the assistance provided to 307,000 persons out of an initial target of 787,500, within the framework of five inter-agency convoys. That represents 39 per cent of the target, as compared to 28 per cent for the previous month of February. Given the Syrian authorities' approval of 71.7 per cent of the United Nations requests for April and May, we hope to see more progress in successfully providing humanitarian assistance. We nevertheless renew our call on those same Syrian authorities to continue issuing the facilitation letters, which are necessary for optimally carrying out the plans conceptualized by the United Nations humanitarian agencies and their partners.

We remind all parties to the Syrian conflict of their obligations under international humanitarian law and human rights law to ensure the population's access to assistance, including medical care, in total security, without any restriction, precondition or hindrance, through the most direct means possible in accordance with the relevant Security Council resolutions.

We hope that the technical meetings of the Astana process, held in Tehran and to be held in Astana in early May, will contribute to strengthening and consolidating the ceasefire. Even better, it is important that the truce be reflected in a clear improvement in providing humanitarian assistance under the direction of the United Nations. In that vein, we welcome the work of the Task Force on the Ceasefire of the International Syria Support Group, co-chaired by the United States and the Russian Federation, which, despite major constraints on the ground, is pursuing its efforts to ensure providing humanitarian assistance, particularly in besieged areas where access to aid is rendered virtually impossible. All those efforts must be continued and strengthened to cover all the civilians concerned, especially those living in besieged and difficultly accessed areas.

In conclusion, we reiterate our conviction that the only way to end the crisis and its most devastating humanitarian consequences is through a negotiated

political solution based on the Geneva communiqué (S/2012/522, annex) and resolution 2254 (2015), under the auspices of the United Nations.

Mr. Bermúdez (Uruguay) (*spoke in Spanish*): As we do every month, we thank Under-Secretary-General Stephen O'Brien not only for his comprehensive briefing but also for his and his team's work, including that of the thousands of humanitarian workers deployed in Syria, working under extremely difficult conditions. We express our gratitude to all of them.

What more can we say at this stage in the Syrian conflict that has not already been said? Frankly, very little can be added. Uruguay's position has been clear and uniform since assuming its mandate as a non-permanent member of the Security Council last year. Our first goal is and must be to work towards a political solution so as to end the crisis and move towards a peaceful transition in Syria negotiated by all Syrians and backed by the international community. To that end, we have every confidence in the good offices of Special Envoy De Mistura to move forward in the next round of negotiations in Geneva among the parties so as to gradually arrive at points of convergence and give shape to a new chapter in Syria.

Let us avoid the duplicity of the stakeholders inside and outside of the region who call for a negotiated political solution while maintaining their support for armed groups whose actions put them in the same category as Da'esh and the former Al-Nusra Front. Along with the Geneva process, the Astana process is crucial to relaunching and strengthening the cessation of hostilities across the entire Syrian territory, which would lead to a significant reduction in violence in that country. We commend the efforts of Russia, Turkey and Kazakhstan, among others, and hope that they will be able to continue on that path next week. Let us step up the work of the International Syrian Support Group in Geneva, so that we can help it forge a path leading towards a negotiations, which is the only way out of that tragedy. We recall that the Security Council adopted resolution 2336 (2016) calling for such a cessation four months ago. We support that resolution and demand that it be implemented.

Of course, the political process and the cessation of hostilities are only two of the stages that will ensure turning a new page in Syria. The third concerns the humanitarian dimension. We take note of the improvement in humanitarian access in February and

March in hard-to-access, besieged areas. However, compared to a year ago, we are far from any encouraging results. Let us continue to call for the immediate, sustained and unfettered access to everyone, without distinction, in order to provide for the needs of millions of people.

For Uruguay, the protection of civilians in Syria and any other area of conflict is an absolute priority. It is immoral to make distinctions among civilians. Unfortunately, over the past seven years, we have seen the most serious violations of human rights and international humanitarian law by all parties to the conflict. Until there is accountability for those crimes, those responsible will continue to enjoy impunity and commit them. In that regard, we welcome the report presented last Friday by the Independent International Commission of Inquiry on the Syrian Arab Republic during the Arria Formula meeting. We would like to see further exchanges between the Commission and the Security Council, which would be extremely useful to the work of both.

Mid-April was particularly difficult for Syrian civilians. To the continued and indiscriminate bombings and attacks using all types of prohibited weapons was added, on 4 April, the brutal chemical attack in Khan Shaykhun, which all of us here condemned unanimously. We are all aware of why we were unable to adopt a draft resolution. This is a war crime that needs to be comprehensively investigated so as to identify the perpetrators. We are confident in the work of the Organization for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons, and hope that it will soon be able to present illuminating conclusions. We condemn the term "staged", which was used to qualify this cowardly and disproportionate attack. That incident triggered the unilateral use of force by some Member States. We reiterate that this is the least appropriate way of dealing with this kind of situation because it only increases the tensions and undermines the reaching of a solution to the conflict at the multilateral level.

The other incident that marked this month was the brutal attack against civilians being evacuated from Fo'ah and Kefraya in the framework of the agreement of the four towns, which also includes Madaya and Zabadani. Although we share the concerns about forced displacement of the population, which could constitute a war crime, we must also take into account that there are scores of thousands that are still in difficult conditions in besieged areas, and they are the victims

of constant bombings and attacks. In many cases they are dying of hunger. Any evacuation must ensure the safety of civilians, ensure the provision of humanitarian assistance and make efforts to ensure that they can eventually return to their homes as soon as possible.

A year since the adoption of resolution 2286 (2016), we continue to witness the destruction of hospitals and other medical facilities in Syria. It is an outrage that the parties have ignored their commitments, thereby depriving thousands of people of their right to medical assistance and causing hundreds of victims among medical personnel. We see this practice repeated in schools, markets and other places of civilian infrastructure. We condemn such attacks in Syria, Yemen and wherever else they occur. They are also war crimes, and those responsible must be held accountable.

In conclusion, we would like to make several requests. First, we must consolidate the cessation of hostilities across the entire Syrian territory. Secondly, we must call on all disputing parties to protect civilians and civilian infrastructure, including medical facilities. Thirdly, we request that the Syrian authorities eliminate or minimize bureaucratic restrictions to ensure that supplies and humanitarian assistance can reach hard-to-reach and besieged areas. Fourthly, there is already a ceasefire in force, adopted through resolution 2336 (2016). We add our voice to the call made by the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs to establish a humanitarian pause of 48 hours in eastern Ghouta. That should be the practice in all areas under siege.

Mr. Cardi (Italy): I thank Mr. O'Brien for his briefing. He and the humanitarian agencies have the full support of Italy.

As we know, the Syrian conflict has already caused unspeakable levels of human suffering, death and displacement. International humanitarian law is violated. Terrorists continue to kill scores of Syrians, including children — like in the barbaric attack in Al-Rashidin on 15 April. The carnage, which reached new heights of horror with the chemical weapons attack in Khan Shaykhun, offends our common humanity and can undermine any path towards a credible end to the Syrian conflict.

We take note of the increase in the number of inter-agency convoys that have reached their destinations in hard-to-reach areas since last month. That demonstrates that humanitarian access can be

provided in Syria. But it is not enough. It is important to focus on besieged areas, where the situation clearly is worsening, especially in eastern Ghouta, where the 400,000 people under siege have no medical facilities to rely upon since all has been destroyed. Convoys are ready to deliver much-needed assistance to Douma and elsewhere, but cannot proceed. The armed faction has provided written guarantee for the convoys, whereas the regime — despite Russian pressure — continues to deny this authorization. We support the call, therefore, for an immediate pause in the fighting to allow for humanitarian aid to be delivered to eastern Ghouta, which cannot become the next Aleppo. The Security Council should closely monitor this issue and step up the pressure on the relevant parties.

Local agreements between the parties to the conflict, often reached after months of siege and bombings — such as the agreement of the four towns — are also cause for concern. They respond to the military logic of the conflict rather than ensure the protection of civilians. The evacuations that follow such agreements, in which the United Nations is neither involved nor an observer, have to respect humanitarian principles. We encourage the United Nations to monitor the evacuation in the four towns and Al-Waer in order to ensure the protection of civilians and prevent further violations of humanitarian law.

The consequences of the conflict have spread across the region. Instability radiates far beyond Syria, be it in the form of terrorism or in the form of uncontrolled flows of refugees. Legal and safe ways to ensure the movement of people fleeing from conflicts are paramount. We commend neighbouring countries that provide refuge to the millions of people who have fled the fighting. In that regard, the Italian Government is carrying out a programme called Humanitarian Corridors, which allows safe and legal entry to Italy for people fleeing the horrors of the combat. It is an act of solidarity and a means to combat trafficking, a model that other countries are following.

I also wish to highlight the contribution of the recent Brussels conference. Italy confirmed its commitment of humanitarian aid and longer-term assistance for 2017-2018; but of course humanitarian assistance must be delivered to the population. The conference also resulted in renewed efforts by the international community, both in the response to the humanitarian tragedy and also in the direction of a political solution because. As we know, the humanitarian and political

dimensions are deeply interconnected. Improving the humanitarian situation is key to creating a constructive environment in Geneva, where talks will resume under the leadership of Staffan de Mistura. We cannot allow that critical negotiation to be jeopardized by an intensification of fighting on the ground or by continued lack of humanitarian access to the population. The co-guarantors of the ceasefire and the Special Envoy have a responsibility in that respect, and we look forward to the next Astana meeting.

What emerged also in the Group of Seven ministerial meetings in Italy recently, which also included key regional stakeholders, is that only a political settlement to implement resolution 2254 (2015) will bring this conflict and the dire humanitarian situation to an end.

In conclusion, I wish to reaffirm the importance of accountability for those responsible for the terrible crimes we are witnessing in Syria. Italy will continue to work with Council members to that end.

Mr. Delattre (France) (*spoke in French*): I wish to sincerely thank Mr. Stephen O'Brien for his briefing and his commitment. He has once again reminded us of our responsibilities with regard to the Syrian tragedy.

Since our last humanitarian consultations, one more step has been taken into the horror. The chemical-weapons attack at Khan Shaykhun on 4 April killed more than 80 people and injured more than 500. We expect the Secretary-General's next report to address very precisely the humanitarian consequences of this tragedy.

Information that France has obtained, which the French Minister for Foreign Affairs, Mr. Jean-Marc Ayrault, made public yesterday, provides evidence of the use of sarin gas and the responsibility of the regime, which will have to answer for these crimes. Syria undertook in 2013 to never again use chemical weapons and to destroy all of its chemical-weapons capabilities. More than ever now, we must remind the regime of its obligations. More broadly, the prohibition of the use of chemical weapons must remain an absolute and universal obligation, as it is one of the pillars of our collective security.

Ten days after 4 April, a convoy of civilians was attacked by a vehicle bomb in the Al-Rashidin transit zone, killing at least 130 people, including 67 children. Once again the Syrian population has been directly targeted. The price it is paying is unbearable. This

tragedy took place in a very particular context, namely, that of the cross-displacement of populations. So far, more than 11,000 people have been evacuated from the so-called four towns of Fo'ah, Kafraya, Zabadani and Madaya. I would like to remind the Security Council that civilian evacuations must be undertaken on a voluntary basis. The Secretary-General has clearly pointed out that the forced displacement of populations may constitute war crimes, and the populations concerned must be allowed to choose their destination.

In that context, we appeal again to those who support the Syrian regime to exert all the pressure needed for it to comply with its international obligations and allow for full, secure, unconditional and unhindered access by the United Nations and its humanitarian partners to people in need throughout Syria. The lives of hundreds of thousands of people hang in the balance, but United Nations access to the population is still as hampered as ever, especially for besieged cities. We recall that the use of hunger as a weapon of war and obstacles to relief are war crimes, and we reiterate with force our call for the immediate lifting of all sieges.

The gap between the aid reaching the zones controlled by the regime and the aid granted to areas held by the opposition can only grow. Throughout March, United Nations agencies submitted new requests for access, but the Government's refusals deprived more than 68,000 people of food assistance in Homs, Dar'a and rural Damascus. We are particularly concerned about the humanitarian situation in eastern Ghouta. Humanitarian convoys were planned by the United Nations in this area. However, the facilitation letters for the loading of the convoy have not yet been issued by the regime, whereas the opposition has given sufficient guarantees in terms of security for the letting the convoys through. We therefore call on the parties to take all necessary measures to enable aid workers to proceed without delay and in complete safety with the delivery of aid.

Moreover, the Syrian authorities persist in refusing to authorize medicines and medical supplies in humanitarian convoys. This is unacceptable. The World Health Organization's requests for access to five areas of the country have remained unanswered. This is simply not acceptable. France recalls the right of the Syrian population to humanitarian assistance and protection, in accordance with international humanitarian law and Security Council resolutions. The attacks on the hospitals and schools, in particular,

to which Stephen O'Brien has referred, also calls for our strongest condemnation.

The situation we are describing no longer has anything to do with a cessation of hostilities. The regime has consistently violated its commitments methodically — systematically — while claiming to carry out actions against Da'esh. Violence intensifies, especially in the provinces of Hama, Damascus and Dar'a. The air strikes of the regime against civilians continue east of Qalamoun. Indiscriminate attacks against civilians are taking place incessantly. The guarantors of the truce concluded on 29 December took responsibility for overseeing its implementation. We therefore appeal to the States guarantors of the Astana process, and in particular to Russia and Iran, to impose on the Syrian regime a complete cessation of hostilities.

In that context, the establishment of an efficient international mechanism for monitoring the ceasefire is a necessity that France has regularly called for and for which it has made concrete proposals. The improvement of the situation on the ground is essential for the resumption of the negotiations in Geneva during the month of May with a view to a political transition, and this, of course, under the auspices of the United Nations. That is the only way to save Syria from the abyss of violence, that of Da'esh and that of the regime, which are feeding each other.

We all know that a tangible and lasting improvement in the situation in Syria is possible only in the context of a political settlement of the crisis based on a political transition in the country, as provided for in resolution 2254 (2015) and the Geneva communiqué (S/2012/522, annex). To put it bluntly, any credible revival of political negotiations presupposes much stronger pressure from Russia on the Damascus regime, as well as on the continuation of the recent American strikes, which we have approved, and a real political re-engagement of the United States in Syria in parallel with the efforts of Europeans and other stakeholders. Rest assured, Madam President, of the France's determined commitment in this direction.

Mr. Sadykov (Kazakhstan): We express our deep appreciation for Under-Secretary-General O'Brien's update and commend him for his commitment and that of the staff of the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs to mitigating the grave humanitarian suffering in Syria, which has reached unprecedented proportions. We are concerned about the

grave humanitarian catastrophe in the country, which must be addressed on various fronts. We believe that the solution of the military problems requires serious progress on the following issues.

First, we must see further advancement of the political process facilitated by the Geneva and Astana processes. The ceasefire agreement is crucial for humanitarian action to be possible and should be preserved. Secondly, countering terrorist groups needs unified actions that will significantly improve the humanitarian situation. Thirdly, we need to strengthen the commendable efforts of the International Committee of the Red Cross, the Syrian Red Crescent Society and the relevant United Nations agencies. We pay tribute to the large number of United Nations personnel and humanitarian workers who labour in such hazardous conditions, some of whom have sacrificed a great deal for the noble cause of peace.

Equally important are the efforts of the international community to restore the damaged infrastructure and develop an integrated programme to rebuild the country's economic potential, by providing, *inter alia*, electricity and water supplies and education for children and by setting up schools and hospitals in areas liberated from terrorists. These measures must commence now and not wait until after reaching an agreement. Undoubtedly the recovery process should serve as a powerful impetus for the return of refugees and reduce the social base of the armed and terrorist groups.

We welcome the humanitarian response plan for Syria for 2017, with its budget of \$3.4 billion for comprehensive humanitarian assistance. We thank the donors for their continued support and urge them to honour their commitments and pledges so that the United Nations can maintain operations on such a large scale throughout the country.

We are concerned about the continuing indiscriminate attacks that result in innocent civilians' death or long-term injury and impairment. The parties to the conflict should comply forthwith with their obligations under the relevant international law and take all the appropriate steps to protect those civilians who have ceased to take part in the hostilities, including members of ethnic and religious communities.

Political tensions that produce such a level of human suffering can have no military solution. Kazakhstan therefore calls on the members of the Security Council and the parties to the conflict and those who

have influence on them to work to achieve a political settlement of the conflict in Syria so as not to further escalate those tensions and undo the progress that has been made in Geneva and Astana.

Mr. Zhang Dianbin (China) (*spoke in Chinese*): I would like to thank Under-Secretary-General Stephen O'Brien for his briefing.

The conflict in Syria has resulted in massive civilian casualties, and China sympathizes deeply with the suffering of the Syrian people. We strongly urge all the parties in Syria to reach a settlement through dialogue and consultation. Recently, while the intra-Syrian ceasefire has been holding, thanks to the concerted efforts of the international community, in some regions it allows for no optimism. China welcomes the important role that the Astana dialogue is playing in maintaining the ceasefire and hopes that the new round of talks will help to consolidate the current momentum.

We commend the efforts of United Nations aid agencies to continue to scale up their assistance and send out more convoys to various parts of Syria. We urge all the parties in Syria to work diligently to implement the ceasefire agreement and take appropriate measures to actively coordinate with the United Nations humanitarian assistance efforts while providing speedy, safe and unimpeded humanitarian access so as to create the necessary conditions for United Nations action and for reaching a political settlement of the issue.

China welcomed the recently held Brussels conference on Syria and looks forward to seeing concrete results from it as soon as possible. If the country's humanitarian situation is to be mitigated, the international community must remain committed to a political settlement in Syria. A new round of peace talks will take place in Geneva in mid-May. All the relevant parties must remain firmly committed to their diplomatic efforts and continue to support both the work of Special Envoy de Mistura and the United Nations as a primary mediator. All of the parties in Syria must participate constructively in the talks and on the basis of the principle that the dialogue and negotiations should be Syrian-led and Syrian-owned, with the aim of gradually reaching a complete and lasting solution that is acceptable to all parties.

The terrorist attacks on Syrian territory are a serious setback to international assistance efforts. China condemns the recent terror attack in Al-Rashidin that targeted the evacuation of civilians. We urge for

the intensification of international coordination in countering terrorism, unifying standards and firmly combating all the terrorist organizations on the Council's list. China has supported efforts to mitigate the humanitarian situation in Syria and arrive at a political settlement of the crisis, and we are prepared to continue playing a constructive role in a full, fair and appropriate settlement without further delay.

Mr. Inchauste Jordán (Plurinational State of Bolivia) (*spoke in Spanish*): We thank Under-Secretary-General Stephen O'Brien for his briefing today and for his commitment to the work he has undertaken, which we fully support.

The conflict in Syria is entering its seventh year and the humanitarian situation there continues to be very worrying. To date, according to a report from the World Health Organization on 3 April, about 400,000 people have died and 1.5 million have been injured since the conflict began. According to reports from the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs, 3.5 million people are in need of humanitarian aid. We are very concerned about the fact that, despite the ceasefire that has been implemented in accordance with resolution 2336 (2016), attacks on civilians and civilian infrastructure by some of the parties involved in the conflict have continued. It is deeply regrettable that more than half of the public hospitals and primary-care centres in Syria have closed or are functioning only partially and have found their capacity reduced even further by indiscriminate attacks on civilian infrastructure. We reiterate firmly that the agreements reached under the ceasefire must be complied with and respected, and that all the parties involved are under an obligation to ensure the safety and integrity of those caught up in the conflict.

We commend the fact that in the inter-agency humanitarian assistance plan for April and May, 71.7 per cent of the places to which admission was requested were approved, and we urge all parties to make every effort to ensure that humanitarian assistance reaches all the people provided for in the plan, without obstacles or restrictions and whether or not the areas are easy or difficult to access. We are very disturbed by the fact that the security forces of the parties to the conflict continue to remove first-aid, obstetric and paediatric equipment and other items from the medical supplies in the humanitarian assistance convoys, thereby reducing their capacity and effectiveness and hurting those who are in urgent need. We would like to remind them that

they must allow unconditional access to humanitarian assistance, guarantee and safeguard the convoys' security and integrity and refrain from considering them as military objectives.

We would like to acknowledge the important work that the Russian Centre for Reconciliation of Opposing Sides in the Syrian Arab Republic has been doing, both as a guarantor of security in the deployment of humanitarian assistance and in evacuating people from areas where armed clashes have occurred. We would also like to acknowledge and commend the work being done to alleviate the humanitarian crisis facing the Syrian people by the staff of the various humanitarian agencies and entities such as the International Committee of the Red Cross, the Syrian Red Crescent, the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, UNICEF and the International Organization for Migration, among others.

We deplore the fact that in March more than 450 people, including women and children, died and hundreds more were injured in Da'esh's dastardly attacks, in clashes between the parties to the conflict, and in military operations of the forces on the ground that are fighting Da'esh. We also condemn the criminal and cowardly car-bomb attack of 15 April on the town of Al-Rashidin, which killed more than 120 people, including innocent women and children, who were part of a group of 5,000 civilians being evacuated to Aleppo. The perpetrators of that terrible act should be duly investigated, prosecuted and punished. With regard to the attacks on 4 April in Khan Shaykhun, the Plurinational State of Bolivia firmly condemns the use of chemical weapons or of chemicals as weapons, acts that are unjustifiable and criminal regardless of their motive or where, when and by whom they are committed. The use of chemical weapons is a violation of our obligations under international law. We demand that the attacks be subject to an independent, impartial, unpoliticized, full and conclusive investigation and that those responsible be duly prosecuted and severely punished.

In that regard, we reiterate our firm condemnation of all acts of terrorism as criminal and unjustifiable. It is our unequivocal belief that any counter-terrorism action should be carried out in coordination with the Government so as to prevent the death of innocent civilians, in full respect for all the provisions of resolutions 2254 (2015) and 2336 (2016). In that context, we recognize the tremendous effort being made by the Government and the Syrian people in their struggle

against Da'esh, which is a war they are waging on behalf of all of us.

Finally, we reiterate that the Plurinational State of Bolivia firmly and clearly believes that the only option for resolving this conflict is through a political process that is inclusive, orderly and led by the Syrian people, and we reaffirm our support for the progress made at the Astana and Geneva meetings, which will continue in May. We have high expectations that these forums for dialogue will help us achieve definitive and lasting peace.

Ms. Guadey (Ethiopia): Let me thank Under-Secretary-General Stephen O'Brien for his briefing and continued leadership in addressing the humanitarian crisis in Syria and other places, including in our region. We would like to express our gratitude to the United Nations and its partners for the courageous humanitarian services they provide to millions of Syrians under extremely challenging circumstances.

We remain seriously concerned about the humanitarian conditions in Syria. The continued fighting in multiple areas around the country and the increased militarization on the ground, as the report of the Secretary-General (S/2017/339) demonstrates, is deeply troubling. The continued fighting has resulted in civilian death, injuries and displacement, as well as the destruction of civilian infrastructure, including schools and medical facilities. We also condemned all terrorist attacks, including the heinous terrorist attack in Al-Rashidin on 15 April, which took the lives of more than 126 people many of them children and injured dozens. Unfortunately, it is civilians who continue to bear the brunt of the armed conflict. Hence the protection of civilians remains of paramount importance.

Despite the continued humanitarian deliveries in the first two months of the inter-agency plan, reaching out to those in need for urgent humanitarian assistance remains a critical challenge owing to insecurity and administrative impediments. In that regard, ensuring safe, unimpeded and sustained humanitarian access is indispensable to providing the much-needed humanitarian relief to all Syrians throughout the country. In that connection, we encourage the United Nations to continue its engagement with the Syrian Government to facilitate and improve the approval process.

More than 13 million Syrians require humanitarian assistance every day. Without achieving a Syrian-led political settlement, the tragedy of the Syrian people

will continue with adverse human, political, economic and social consequences. As we have been consistently saying, and we reiterate, that the only lasting solution to put an end to the daily miseries of Syrians is a comprehensive political dialogue based on resolution 2254 (2015) and the Geneva communiqué (S/2012/522, annex) under the auspices of the United Nations.

While it is the Syrians themselves who have the responsibility to ensure sustainable and inclusive peace, the international community, particularly the Security Council, has an essential role to support them in achieving a political solution in stabilizing and reconstructing Syria. In that regard, the Brussels conference, which pledged financial support for the humanitarian work in Syria, is an important initiative, which contributes to addressing the conflict and its regional impact.

We also believe that strengthening the ceasefire guaranteed by Russia, Turkey and Iran, and ensuring its full compliance, is important for the creation of a supporting environment for the next round of intra-Syrian political negotiations, which should take place as quickly as possible with constructive and serious engagements of all parties.

In conclusion, it is an undeniable fact that the armed conflict has caused a long-term humanitarian crisis that will continue to have a damaging impact on Syrians for years to come. The continued worrying situation on the ground and the scale of the suffering of the Syrians makes the search for a political solution more urgent than ever.

Mr. Yelchenko (Ukraine): I wish to thank the United States presidency for organizing today's meeting. Let me also join my colleagues and thank Stephen O'Brien for his briefing and his devoted position.

Syria continues to suffer from a terrible six-year-long war which has left unhealing scars on the Syrian people and has presented an immense challenge to the entire world. It is clear from the Secretary-General's report (S/2017/339) and Stephen O'Brien's briefing that negative trends in the humanitarian domain are increasing. Though March was a somewhat better month in terms of United Nations humanitarian access, we need to bear in mind that progress is limited mostly to the hard-to-reach areas, while the besieged ones, where more than 600,000 people live, need assistance the most.

The Council has stated time and again that the sieges must be lifted and that access must be granted and maintained in a sustainable manner. Yet, here we are with practically no progress to report. The reason is simple enough. Continuing the sieges is a deliberate tactic of the Al-Assad regime and his allies that supplements and feeds his military strategy. The essence of this tactic is starve or surrender. When people surrender, they put them on the bus and send them to Idlib, where they continue to bomb them again and again.

We are dismayed by recent reports of Syrian or Russian air strikes on a hospital in a rebel-held Idlib province two days ago that killed more than a dozen people, including patients. The recent terrorist attack against evacuees who were being carried by buses from the besieged towns in Syria, which led to the death of more than 100 people, including children, is another terrible crime and a demonstration of shameless disregard for human life, which we have seen so many times throughout the conflict. We strongly condemn the continuing violence against the civilian population in Syria, which has suffered immensely during this brutal war.

The situation in eastern Ghouta, where approximately 400,000 people are besieged in a number of towns and surrounding rural areas, is particularly worrisome. Of the 3 public hospitals and 17 health-care centres in eastern Ghouta, not one is functioning. Hitting medical facilities and schools is also part of the aforementioned deliberate tactics of the Al-Assad regime and his allies. In March alone, the United Nations received credible reports of 19 attacks against medical facilities. Such a reckless and deliberate strategy carries fundamental risks for the long-term stability not only of Syria and the Levant, but also of the entire Middle East and North Africa region. The six-year war keeps 1.75 million children out of school, with 7,000 schools completely destroyed and 85 per cent of Syrians living in poverty. As long as there is no progress on this and other humanitarian issues, we can rest assured that the Al-Assad regime is in no mood to seriously engage in political talks.

Against that backdrop, there is still an active and aggressive recruitment campaign being carried out in Syria by Al-Qaida and the Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant. Leaving Syrians without hope any longer will create a long-term terrorist safe heaven in the very heart of the region. The stakes are really high. There is

no more time for lip service or subversive strategies. Serious and responsible political engagement in Geneva and immediate humanitarian relief efforts are long past due. The Council should finally react to the numerous desperate calls of Stephen O'Brien and his colleagues.

Mr. Iliichev (Russian Federation) (*spoke in Russian*): We thank Mr. O'Brien for his briefing.

In general, in Syria, the cessation of hostilities that began on 30 December 2016 is holding. At the same time, there have been incidents in which it has been undermined and there have been actions carried out by terrorists and armed groups. Their offensive actions, including those taken in Damascus, which undermined the most recent round of inter-Syrian talks in Geneva, are fresh in our memory. These types of escalations have an adverse impact on the humanitarian situation.

The ongoing criticism of the Syrian Government and the emotional calls to the country's guarantors, including Russia, do not help matters.

We are carrying out our obligations in good faith. There are other influential players who are unfortunately in no hurry to meet us halfway. In that regard, the only approach that can have a positive impact is a collective one. And we should not forget the ongoing importance of the task of separating the constructively disposed opposition from the terrorists. The first steps in that direction succeeded only thanks to the joint efforts of the countries that are the guarantors of the Astana process, but much remains to be done.

In many cases, the cessation of hostilities regime has enabled the various humanitarian convoys agreed on with the Syrian Government to proceed successfully, and the progress made in the past few months is evident. Painstaking efforts to establish the parameters for humanitarian access and a medical evacuation in eastern Ghouta are ongoing. Given the delicate nature and operational constraints of that effort, we should not count on getting instant results. Brash public-relations campaigns will not help. To start with, it is not as simple as some would like to imagine, and the problem is not just about facilitation letters, but also because one key reason for the difficulties is the provocative actions of the fighters.

Furthermore, we do not fully share the concerns about the situation in this area. Rural Damascus is an ancient farming region that provides the capital with food. It is no accident that the report of the

Secretary-General (S/2017/339) notes that the supply of agricultural products from eastern Ghouta to Damascus has been halted as a result of the worsening situation. We understand that sending humanitarian convoys in a time of conflict is always fraught with risk, and not everything goes according to plan. Our military specialists often accompany caravans, which is why, unlike the humanitarian theoreticians, we know first-hand the cost of those operations. In order to draw up optimal parameters for them, we still need the platform of the humanitarian task force of the International Syria Support Group.

In spite of all this, however, the reconciliation process is under way in a number of Syrian neighbourhoods. Thanks to the activities of the Russian Centre in Hmeimim, at least 1,500 towns have joined the process. Such agreements also take the form of local truces, in which appropriate agreements are signed by representatives of the authorities and militia leaders. For instance, we are close to concluding a local truce in the problematic area of Al-Waer in the city of Homs. While members of the illegal armed groups and their families are leaving for areas of Syria that have not gone along with the cessation of hostilities regime, many of the rebels have decided to return to a peaceful life by accepting the Government's amnesty; we hope that the problem of the four towns can be addressed when the regional power centres reach a firm agreement.

The treacherous terrorist attack in Al-Rashidin on residents evacuated from Fo'ah and Kefraya rightly aroused outrage across the globe. In that connection, we do not agree with the criticism of the practice of concluding local truces. It may not be ideal, but it is a practical instrument for bringing normalcy to the situation and saving lives on a temporary basis, as experience has shown in eastern Aleppo and other urban areas. Now Syrians need help in restoring decent living conditions in liberated areas so they can return to their homes.

We were surprised by the statements of our United Kingdom and French colleagues regarding local truces, which are the result of agreements between the Government and relevant opposition groups. They represent another option for avoiding the greater numbers of casualties that would occur without such agreements. In that regard, double standards are still at work. When Muslim populations in the Central African Republic were moved from the capital and western areas to the north-east, with the participation

of the United Nations and the French operation, it was justified as an attempt to save human lives. We all know what happened. The Muslim population in the capital of Bangui was reduced by 99 per cent and the consequences of the move are still being felt today. The destabilization we are now seeing now in the centre of the country is being provoked specifically from the north-East, where the Muslims were moved. Let us refrain from distinguishing between the dignity of the lives of Syrians and of people in other countries where we have to act from the best motives to try to save lives.

We are seriously concerned about the situation in the north of Syria, where several military operations are breaking out simultaneously. The majority of the participants, including the so-called coalition, were not invited in by the Syrian Government. This is a clear violation of the sovereignty of the country and encroaches on its territorial integrity. Peaceful civilians are being killed in the bombing and vital infrastructure is being destroyed. The strikes on the Kurdish militias who have been fighting the terrorists this entire time are in total contradiction to the international community's professed determined resistance to this evil.

We must never allow ourselves to ignore the fact that we have no idea of what is going on in the areas that are still controlled by terrorists or how hundreds of thousands of people are living. Neither the United Nations nor most of its partners have access to these areas. We are not talking just about Deir ez-Zor, where at least humanitarian assistance is being provided via air drops. We have to point out here that the humanitarian reports on Syria sometimes retouch facts that support criticism of the fighters of armed groups. Unverified information circulates. The Syrian Government trusts external participants very little, for obvious reasons, since against the backdrop of an anti-Damascus campaign all they see is provocation. Why would we want to aggravate that feeling rather than restore the prospects for cooperation with Damascus?

It is disappointing that there is once again a lack of data about the stocks of medicines used to support terrorist fighters that were discovered in eastern Aleppo after it was liberated. We demanded that the circumstances be investigated and brought to light and for more than a month now have been waiting for results that were supposed to be officially reported to the Security Council. Incidentally, similar stocks of medicines were discovered in Zabadani and Madaya after they were liberated.

We call attention once again to the urgent issue of demining Syria, including its cultural heritage sites. While the Russian and Syrian specialists have worked well together and have demined thousands of hectares of residential areas in Aleppo and done major sapper work in Palmyra, we need a united effort in this area. In that regard, we call for establishing an international demining coalition for Syria from among the interested countries and hope to include the relevant United Nations agencies in that. We also believe that it would be appropriate to create a fund to finance commercial companies that could participate in the demining.

The United Nations humanitarian bodies, the International Committee of the Red Cross and the Syria Red Crescent have been working furiously for the past two weeks to restore normal life to the people. We should not forget that despite unfair externally imposed sanctions, the Syrian Government has also been making massive efforts — a fact about which the reports are usually silent. Help is also being provided by international and local non-governmental organizations (NGOs). However, we should emphasize that we take a critical view of certain NGOs that are obeying the orders of their foreign sponsors and violating Syria's sovereignty by working exclusively in areas that are not controlled by the Government. The White Helmets, who have been heaped with praise in Western capitals, are a prime example, frequently displaying a lack of conscience in publishing false information and staging film footage designed to blacken the Syrian Government and army's reputation. There are multiple examples of evidence of their direct ties to terrorists and extremists.

Russia is providing Syrians with humanitarian assistance on an almost daily basis, in some cases with the participation of our foreign partners. Medical assistance is being provided, and more than 12,000 Syrians have received care from qualified personnel.

We underscore our unstinting support for a peaceful solution in Syria, guided by the idea that the country's fate should be decided by Syrians themselves. Furthermore, Russia is in the front lines of those efforts. We do not see any reason to diverge from agreed-upon parameters for the political process guided by the United Nations. Syrian sides have already taken on board the United Nations-formulated proposal on the basis of the four baskets, including building a constitution and counter-terrorism activities. The processes in Astana and Geneva are vital working forums that complement

one another. Progress on all negotiating tracks is the best way to improve the humanitarian situation.

The President: I shall now make a statement in my capacity as the representative of the United States.

It has been just three weeks since the world was horrified by pictures of poisoned children in Syria, the result of deadly nerve agents dropped from the sky. Those images of suffering and dying children will never be forgotten. But there is a quieter, slower kind of death occurring in Syria today. It is even more deliberate, more labour-intensive and more widespread than dropping chemical weapons from thousands of feet in the air. The Syrian regime is engaged in a purposeful strategy of siege and surrender. Civilians stranded inside are literally kept as prisoners until they die or kneel before the Government. They are denied food. They are also denied lifesaving medical supplies. That campaign of holding humanitarian relief hostage to Al-Assad's political goals is not new, but it is worsening. More humanitarian assistance is being denied to besieged areas today than at this time last year. More Syrian men, women and children are suffering and dying because aid is not being allowed through. That is what the Syrian dictator means when he says that "the only option is victory".

Al-Assad will tighten the noose around the necks of his own people until they give in. The Syrian Government's slow strangulation of its people happens so frequently and so similarly that it has almost become textbook. First Government forces or their allies surround a city, town or village. They cut off all commercial routes in and out. Then the United Nations requests access to bring relief to the people as food and medical supplies vanish. The United Nations mission is a humanitarian one: they do not care who the people are or whether they are pro-Government or pro-opposition. They just want to save human lives.

But the Syrian regime does not let them. They hide behind bureaucracy and deny requests for humanitarian access. That is permission the Government could easily give if it actually wanted to do so. The few convoys that manage to get approvals are often held up at checkpoints. They are stopped by Al-Assad's soldiers, or by rogue militias that the Al-Assad regime cannot, or will not, control. The aid they carry does not reach those who need it. And month after month we sit in the Security Council and talk about these very issues, and nothing changes.

Even more bone-chilling is the fact that convoys that do get through are increasingly looted of medical supplies — items that have no military purpose but are essential to saving the lives of civilians who do not bow to the regime. Syrian Government forces and pro-Government militias remove baby formula, vaccines and forceps from midwifery kits. They raid paediatric kits of antibiotics, needles and gauze. They remove dialysis equipment, family hygiene kits and burn kits from trucks. There is no reason I can conceivably think of for that to happen. Maybe my colleagues from Russia and other allies of the Syrian regime can help me out. What possible definition of humanitarian relief does not include antibiotics and dialysis equipment? What possible justification is there for preventing malnourished women and their children from receiving baby formula from the United Nations and its partners?

Of course there is no justification, but there is a reason. With impunity, Syrian regime troops on the ground work to prevent United Nations aid from going to the men, women and children who need it. At the same time, they operate black markets and they sell many of the same products. Medical supplies that desperate people should be getting for free are instead sold at inflated prices or extorted through bribes at checkpoints. This is a major business in Syria, and yet another reason that the sieges have not been lifted.

People are profiting off the suffering and dying of the Syrian people, and none of this is prevented or even opposed by Russia. According to the United Nations latest report, medical items that would have provided 36,000 lifesaving and life-sustaining treatment were removed from humanitarian convoys in March. As we speak, 450,000 people in the Damascus suburbs are being slowly squeezed by the Syrian regime. Those areas have been under siege since 2012, but recently Government forces closed the last routes for even black markets to get into the city. They have blocked all humanitarian aid deliveries since last October.

The people in the Damascus suburbs just like in other besieged areas of Syria, are slowly dying. Cancer patients are dying from lack of chemotherapy. Kidney patients are dying from lack of dialysis. And children are suffering most of all: nearly one third of all war-related injuries are two children under the age of 15. But because the Syrian military has bombed all the hospitals in the area, they cannot receive professional treatment for their injuries.

Those are the atrocities occurring in Syria every day that do not make the headlines. A resident doctor in one of the only cancer centres serving the besieged areas summed up the condition of her patients tragically well when she said, "death is coming at them from every direction". When death surrounds you, words mean very little. Al-Assad has proven he will act only to increase the suffering of his people, not ease it. And so it falls to others to do what basic human decency requires.

Russia must live up to its promise to deliver real peace talks and a real political solution. The sieges of the Syrian people must be lifted. The war profiteering and the theft of medical supplies must be stopped. Syrians in desperate need of humanitarian assistance must receive it. Bashar Al-Assad clearly believes it is necessary to starve hundreds of thousands of people in order to remain in power.

When I asked the Council, as we talked about everything that is happening here, I heard from each and every member some word of desperation and of defeat because we talk about this so much, and every time we talk about it more people continue to die. I listened to my Russian colleague, and he talked about task forces and diplomacy and less criticism of the Syrian regime. Where has that gotten us? It has not gotten us anywhere. On the times where we could actually do something as a Security Council, who is the one Member State that continues to protect the regime that is keeping humanitarian assistance from going through?

Many members have said that we need to put pressure on the Syrian regime. That is actually not the case. We need to put pressure on Russia, because Russia continues to cover for the Syrian regime. Russia continues to allow them to keep humanitarian aid from the people that need it. Russia continues to cover for a leader who uses chemical weapons against his own people. Russia continues to veto. And Al-Assad continues to do those things because they know that Russia will continue to cover for them.

Sitting in this Chamber, I appreciate all the comments that members have made. But all eyes and

all pressure now need to go to Russia, because they are the ones that can stop this if they want to. Do not listen to the distractions of what they are trying to say while pointing to other conflicts. Do not listen to the fact that they claim the reports now are wrong. First it was the Security Council that was wrong; now it is Mr. O'Brien's report that is wrong. But the images do not lie. The humanitarian workers do not lie. The fact that they cannot get the assistance they need — that is not lying. What is is to continue to give Russia a pass for allowing this terrible situation to occur.

I will continue to press the Security Council to act to do something, regardless of whether the Russians continue to veto it, because it is our voice that needs to be heard. The Syrian people do not care about diplomacy. They do not care about any sort of task force. They do not care about any of the things we said today. They are just trying to live their very last day.

I now resume my functions as President of the Security Council.

No surprise, the representative of the Russian Federation has asked for the floor to make a further statement.

Mr. Ilüichev (Russian Federation) (*spoke in Russian*): With regard to your statement, Madam President, allow me to once again call your attention to the fact — stressed by many who took the floor today — that Russia, Turkey and Iran are doing their part to ensure that there is compliance with the cessation of hostilities, which is the best way to bring about an improvement in the humanitarian situation in Syria. Neither you, Madam, or Western colleagues said a single word about what they are doing to improve the situation. How are they bringing pressure to bear on the moderate or non-moderate opposition that they have influence over? Mr. O'Brien, in his briefing, did directly touch upon those areas that are surrounded or controlled by terrorists.

The meeting rose at noon.





Security Council

Seventy-second year

7932nd meeting

Friday, 28 April 2017, 10 a.m.

New York

Provisional

President: Mr. Tillerson (United States of America)

Members:

Bolivia (Plurinational State of)	Mr. Llorentty Soliz
China	Mr. Wang Yi
Egypt	Mr. Aboulatta
Ethiopia	Mr. Gebeyehu
France	Mr. Delattre
Italy	Mr. Della Vedova
Japan	Mr. Kishida
Kazakhstan	Mr. Abdrakhmanov
Russian Federation	Mr. Gatilov
Senegal	Mr. Ndiaye
Sweden	Ms. Söder
Ukraine	Mr. Yelchenko
United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland ..	Mr. Johnson
Uruguay	Mr. Rosselli

Agenda

Non-proliferation/Democratic People's Republic of Korea

Letter dated 18 April 2017 from the Permanent Representative of the United States of America to the United Nations addressed to the Secretary-General (S/2017/337)

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The meeting was called to order at 10 a.m.

Adoption of the agenda

The agenda was adopted.

Non-proliferation/Democratic People's Republic of Korea

Letter dated 18 April 2017 from the Permanent Representative of the United States of America to the United Nations addressed to the Secretary-General (S/2017/337)

The President: I wish to warmly welcome the Secretary-General, ministers and other representatives present in the Security Council Chamber. Their presence underscores the importance of the subject matter we will discuss today.

In accordance with rule 37 of the Council's provisional rules of procedure, I invite the representative of the Republic of Korea to participate in this meeting.

On behalf of the Council, I welcome His Excellency Mr. Yun Byung-se, Minister for Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Korea.

The Security Council will now begin its consideration of the item on its agenda.

I wish to draw the attention of Council members to document S/2017/337, which contains a letter dated 18 April 2017 from the Permanent Representative of United States of America to the United Nations addressed to the Secretary-General, transmitting a concept paper on the item under consideration.

I give the floor to the Secretary-General.

The Secretary-General: Allow me to first thank the United States and you personally, Mr. President, for convening this meeting.

The situation on the Korean peninsula is one of the longest-standing and most serious issues before the United Nations. The Security Council first adopted a resolution (resolution 825 (1993)) on the Democratic People's Republic of Korea nuclear issue in 1993, when it urged the Democratic People's Republic of Korea not to withdraw from the Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons. Twenty-four years later, and despite extensive efforts, the challenge is still unresolved.

In response to the accelerated nuclear and ballistic missile activities of the Democratic People's Republic

of Korea, the Security Council has adopted two sanctions resolutions (resolutions 2270 (2016) and 2321 (2016)) and met 11 times in emergency consultations since January 2016. During that period, the Democratic People's Republic of Korea conducted two nuclear tests, more than 30 launches using ballistic missile technology and various other activities relating to its nuclear and ballistic missile programmes. Its launches using ballistic missile technology have included tests of short-, medium-, intermediate-range and submarine-launched ballistic missiles, as well as the placement of a satellite in orbit.

Those tests and launches are clear violations of Security Council resolutions. The absence of coordination and notification in advance of these launches, other than the space launch on 7 February 2016, is contrary to internationally accepted regulations and standards adopted by the International Maritime Organization and the International Civil Aviation Organization. Aircraft and ships have been prevented from planning their routes in order to steer clear of those hazardous activities. And adjacent States have been prevented from promulgating dangerous, restricted or prohibited areas in their areas of responsibility.

The International Atomic Energy Agency remains unable to access the Democratic People's Republic of Korea to verify the status of its nuclear programme. The Agency continues to monitor developments through satellite imagery and has observed "signatures" consistent with the operation of the plutonium-production reactor and the reported centrifuge enrichment facility. Commercial satellite imagery analysis has also indicated continued activity at the Democratic People's Republic of Korea's nuclear test site, which is believed to be maintained in a state of readiness to conduct additional nuclear-test explosions.

The Democratic People's Republic of Korea has increasingly stressed the importance of nuclear deterrence in its military doctrine. At the seventh Congress of the Workers Party of Korea, held in March 2016, the country's leader, Mr. Kim Jong Un, described the country as a responsible nuclear-weapon State. More recently, in a statement to the United Nations Disarmament Commission on 3 April 2017, while reaffirming its support for comprehensive and complete nuclear disarmament, the Democratic People's Republic of Korea stated that "going nuclear-armed is the policy of our State" (see A/CN.10/PV.363).

The Democratic People's Republic of Korea is the only country to have conducted nuclear tests in this century. We must assume that, with each test or launch, the Democratic People's Republic of Korea continues to make technological advances in its pursuit of a military nuclear capability.

I condemn in the strongest terms the Democratic People's Republic of Korea's repeated violations of the relevant Security Council resolutions. The Democratic People's Republic of Korea's continued pursuit of its nuclear-weapon and ballistic-missile programmes, in defiance of repeated demands by the Security Council to cease such activities, threatens to destabilize regional and international security and seriously undermines international disarmament and non-proliferation efforts.

I am alarmed by the risk of a military escalation in the region, including by miscalculation or misunderstanding. I am particularly concerned by the possibility that efforts to offset the destabilizing activities of the Democratic People's Republic of Korea could also result in increased arms competition and tensions, further impeding the ability of the international community to maintain unity and achieve a peaceful solution.

The onus is on the Democratic People's Republic of Korea to comply with its international obligations. At the same time, the international community must also step up its efforts to manage and reduce tensions.

The absence of communication channels with the Democratic People's Republic of Korea could be dangerous. Armed conflict in North-East Asia, which is home to one fifth of the world's people and gross domestic product, would have global ramifications.

We need to avoid miscalculation and misunderstanding. We need to act now to prevent conflict and achieve sustainable peace. That means the Democratic People's Republic of Korea refraining from further testing, complying with the relevant Security Council resolutions and exploring the resumption of dialogue. It also means reopening and strengthening communication channels, particularly military-to-military, to lower the risk of miscalculation or misunderstanding. And it means all Member States implementing the relevant Security Council resolutions.

I have taken note of the Security Council's commitment to a peaceful diplomatic and political solution to the situation; of efforts by Council members,

as well as other States, to facilitate a peaceful and comprehensive solution through dialogue; and of the importance the Council has placed on working to reduce tensions. The Council has important tools at its disposal, from targeted sanctions to communication channels. As Secretary-General, I am committed to seeking peaceful and political solutions. I stand ready to assist in any way possible, but I would welcome guidance and assistance from the Security Council in this regard.

I welcome the Council's understanding of the importance of the humanitarian imperatives from the political situation. On 21 March, we released the latest Democratic People's Republic of Korea needs and priorities document. For this year, 13 United Nations agencies and international non-governmental organizations operating in the Democratic People's Republic of Korea are calling for \$114 million to meet the urgent needs of 13 million especially vulnerable people — half of the country's population. The people of the Democratic People's Republic of Korea need our generosity and help.

I also call on the authorities of the Democratic People's Republic of Korea to engage with United Nations human rights mechanisms and with the international community to address the grave human rights situation and improve the living conditions of its people. I therefore welcome the visit next week by the United Nations Special Rapporteur on the rights of persons with disabilities to the Democratic People's Republic of Korea. As we discussed in this Chamber on 18 April (see S/PV.7926), improvement on human rights will not only protect the livelihoods and dignity of people in the Democratic People's Republic of Korea, but also promote long-term security and stability in the region and beyond.

I would like to conclude by underlining our collective priority for conflict prevention. We must remain committed to pursuing peaceful and diplomatic paths forward for a peaceful and denuclearized Korean peninsula.

The President: I thank the Secretary-General for that most helpful briefing.

I shall now make a statement in my capacity as the Secretary of State of the United States.

I am grateful for this opportunity to address the Security Council

According to resolution 2321 (2016), the stated objective of the Council is North Korea's abandonment of its nuclear weapons and ballistic-missile programmes. For the past 20 years, well-intentioned diplomatic efforts to halt those programmes have failed. It is only by first dismantling them that there can be peace, stability and economic prosperity for all of North-East Asia.

With each successive detonation and missile test, North Korea pushes North-East Asia and the world closer to instability and broader conflict. The threat of a North Korean nuclear attack on Seoul or Tokyo is real. It is likely only a matter of time before North Korea develops the capability to strike the United States mainland. Indeed, the Democratic People's Republic of Korea has repeatedly claimed that it plans to conduct such a strike. Given that rhetoric, the United States cannot idly stand by, nor can other members of the Council that are within striking distance of North Korean missiles.

Having for years displayed a pattern of behaviour that defies multiple Security Council resolutions, including resolutions 2321 (2016) and 2270 (2016), and erodes global progress on nuclear non-proliferation, there is no reason to think that North Korea will change its behaviour under the current multilateral sanctions framework. For too long, the international community has been reactive in addressing North Korea. Those days must come to an end. Failing to act now on the most pressing security issue in the world may bring catastrophic consequences. We have said this before, and it bears repeating: the policy of strategic patience is over. Additional patience will mean only acceptance of a nuclear North Korea. The longer we bide our time, the sooner we will run out of it.

In the light of this growing threat, the time has come for all of us to put new pressure on North Korea to abandon its dangerous path. I urge the Council to act before North Korea does. We must work together to adopt a new approach and impose increased diplomatic and economic pressure on the North Korean regime. The new campaign that the United States is embarking upon is driven by our own national security considerations and is welcomed by many nations that are concerned for their own security and that question why North Korea claims nuclear capabilities for which it has no need.

Our goal is not regime change, nor do we desire to threaten the North Korean people or destabilize the Asia-Pacific region. Over the years, we have withdrawn

our own nuclear weapons from South Korea and offered aid in North Korea as proof of our intent to de-escalate the situation and normalize relations. Since 1995, the United States has provided more than \$1.3 billion in aid to North Korea. We look forward to resuming our contributions once the Democratic People's Republic of Korea begins to dismantle its nuclear weapons and missile-technology programmes.

For its own sake, the Democratic People's Republic of Korea must dismantle its nuclear-missile programmes if it wants to achieve the security, economic development and international recognition that it seeks. North Korea must understand that respect will never follow recklessness. North Korea must take concrete steps to reduce the threat that its illegal weapons programmes pose to the United States and our allies before we can even consider talks.

I propose that all nations take the following three actions beginning today.

First, we call on States Members of the United Nations fully to implement the commitments that they have made regarding North Korea. This includes all measures required and resolutions 2321 (2016) and 2270 (2016). Those nations that have not fully enforced those resolutions discredit this body.

Secondly, we call on countries to suspend or downgrade diplomatic relations with North Korea. North Korea exploits its diplomatic privileges to fund its illicit nuclear-missile technology programmes, and constraining its diplomatic activity will cut off a flow of needed resources. In the light of North Korea's recent actions, normal relations with the Democratic People's Republic of Korea are simply not acceptable.

Thirdly, we must increase North Korea's financial isolation. We must levy new sanctions on Democratic People's Republic of Korea entities and individuals supporting its weapons and missile programmes and tighten those that are already in place. The United States also would much prefer the countries and peoples in question to own up to their lapses and correct their behaviour themselves, but we will not hesitate to sanction third-country entities and individuals supporting the Democratic People's Republic of Korea's illegal activities.

We must bring maximum economic pressure to bear on the Democratic People's Republic of Korea by severing the trade relationships that directly fund its

nuclear-missile programme. I call on the international community to suspend the flow of North Korean guest workers and to impose bans on North Korean imports, especially coal.

We must all do our share, but China alone, which accounts for 90 per cent of North Korean trade, has economic leverage over Pyongyang Yang that is unique, and its role is therefore particularly important. The United States and China have held very productive exchanges on this issue, and we look forward to further actions that build on what China has already done.

Lastly, as we have said before, all options for responding to future provocation must remain on the table. Diplomatic and financial levers of power will be backed up by willingness to counteract North Korean aggression with military action, if necessary. We would much prefer a negotiated solution to this problem, but we are committed to defending ourselves and our allies against North Korean aggression.

This new pressure campaign will be swiftly implemented and painful to North Korean interests. I realize that some nations for which a relationship with North Korea has been in some ways a net-positive may be disinclined to implement the measures of pressure on North Korea. But the catastrophic effects of a North Korean nuclear strike outweigh any economic benefits. We must be willing to face the hard truths and make hard choices right now so as to prevent disastrous outcomes in future. Business as usual is not an option.

There is also a moral dimension to this problem. Countries must know by now that helping the North Korean regime means enabling cruelty and suffering. North Korea feeds billions of dollars into a nuclear programme it does not need while its own people starve. The regime's pursuit of nuclear weapons does not serve its own national security or the well-being of a people trapped in tyranny. I ask the community of nations to help us preserve security and protect human dignity.

In one of my first trips as America's Secretary of State, I looked across the demilitarized zone at the haunted land of North Korea. Beyond the border is a nation of sorrow, frozen in time. While the world sees the gleaming buildings of Pyongyang, the blight of oppression and starvation has swept this land for more than 60 years.

But even though the present condition of that country is bleak, the United States believes in a future for North

Korea. These first steps towards a more hopeful future will happen most quickly if other stakeholders in the region and the global community join us.

For years, North Korea has been dictating the terms of its dangerous course of action. It is time for us to retake control of the situation. We ask the members of the Council and all other partners to implement a new strategy to denuclearize North Korea.

I now resume my functions as President of the Council.

Mr. Kishida (Japan): I would like to begin by expressing my sincere appreciation to you, Mr. President, for having convened this timely meeting on the denuclearization of North Korea. I wish also to thank Secretary-General Guterres for his informative briefing.

The threat posed by North Korea's nuclear and ballistic-missile development has reached a new level. Since January 2016, it has conducted two nuclear tests and at least 30 ballistic-missile launches. This threat is not just hypothetical. For ordinary citizens, it is only too real. On 6 March, North Korea launched four ballistic missiles, three of which landed within Japan's exclusive economic zone. There was no advance notice, and the consequences of these reckless launches could have been catastrophic for innocent fishing boats, sea vessels and aircraft.

These launches are an intentional provocation, as evidenced by North Korean media reports stating that the North Korean units responsible for striking United States bases in Japan in contingencies were involved. It is therefore increasingly important for the countries in the region to strengthen deterrence so as to ensure peace and security.

Now is a good time to recall the commitments that North Korea has made on denuclearization in the past. In 2005, North Korea, together with China, Japan, the Republic of Korea, the Russian Federation and the United States,

"unanimously reaffirmed that the goal of the six-party talks is the verifiable denuclearization of the Korean peninsula in a peaceful manner"

in a Six-Party Talks joint statement. All parties expect North Korea to remain committed to this position.

There is no doubt that dialogue is necessary to achieve the peaceful denuclearization of the Korean

peninsula. However, in the current situation, in which North Korea continues to advance its nuclear and ballistic-missile programmes, a meaningful dialogue is clearly not possible. In order to bring North Korea back to the negotiating table, the international community must send a strong message that provocation comes at a high price and that no bright future awaits North Korea without its denuclearization.

With this in mind, Japan calls on all Member States to increase pressure on North Korea through the vigorous and thorough implementation of the relevant Security Council resolutions. Japan has been implementing additional measures against North Korea that go beyond its obligations under Security Council resolutions aimed at severely restricting the flow of people, goods and funds, including a total ban on exports and imports. Japan has also actively assisted with capacity-building in the countries of the Association of Southeast Asian Nations in order to enhance the effectiveness of Security Council resolutions. No State should allow itself to become a loophole in the Democratic Republic of Korea's sanctions regime. Japan calls on all States Members of the United Nations that have not already done so to submit national implementation reports to the sanctions committees on the Democratic People's Republic of Korea as required by Security Council resolutions. Any further provocations, including nuclear tests should be met promptly by even more stringent Council resolutions.

The Democratic Republic of Korea has defiantly dismissed Security Council resolutions as illegal and refused to be bound by such obligations. That has real humanitarian consequences. The regime's pursuit of nuclear weapons and ballistic missile development comes at the expense of the welfare and basic needs of the people in the Democratic People's Republic of Korea. Those people include international abductees. In the past, agents of the Democratic Republic of Korea infiltrated Japan and abducted a number of Japanese citizens, including a girl as young as 13 years old. Abductees' futures have been stolen, and their families torn apart. Japan attaches the utmost importance to the abductions issue, which undermines the sovereignty of Japan and casts fear over the lives of our citizens. Victims of abduction are not limited to Japanese citizens. It is a universal issue facing the international community and a violation of fundamental human rights. In urging the Democratic People's Republic of Korea to take concrete

action on that issue, Japan asks for the international community's support and understanding.

Regrettably, the possibility of further provocations by the Democratic People's Republic of Korea is high. The Council must send a clear message that such actions will lead only to more rigorous responses from the international community. Japan strongly urges the Democratic People's Republic of Korea to demonstrate its seriousness, as well as concrete actions on denuclearization. Japan looks forward to continuing to work closely with all of our colleagues here today on this matter.

Mr. Ndiaye (Senegal) (*spoke in French*): I would like to thank you, Sir, for taking the initiative to convene today's debate on the important issue of nuclear non-proliferation. I also thank Secretary-General António Guterres, whose briefing enriches our discussion and allows us to make our efforts clear.

The issue of nuclear non-proliferation is one of the world's priorities, as illustrated by resolution I(1), the first resolution adopted by the General Assembly, in January 1946. The goal of that resolution was to eliminate all atomic weapons. Because it is convinced about the risk that such weapons pose to the survival of humankind, my country is in favour of the complete elimination of military nuclear activities, and not their mere reduction. Complete elimination is the only way to save the world from the devastation that would ensue from the use of nuclear weapons. That alone can ensure the survival of our world and the future of present and future generations, by allowing them to live without the fear of atomic bombs being detonated and in a world freed from the terror of nuclear disaster.

In addition to such clearly identified threats, there is also the increased risk of proliferation by non-State actors, because of the rising incidence of terrorism and new risks emerging from the ill-advised use of rapid advances in science, technology and international trade. In the light of such challenges, my country has firmly denounced the nuclear test carried out by the Democratic People's Republic of Korea on 6 January 2016 and several ballistic missile launches, which are all serious violations of the country's international obligations, pursuant to resolutions 1718 (2006), 1874 (2009), 2087 (2013), 2094 (2013), 2270 (2016), 2321 (2016). Such actions are a clear illustration that the Democratic People's Republic of Korea is moving ahead with its nuclear weapons and ballistic missile

programme and is determined to increase its nuclear power. This not only poses a threat to the people living on the Korean peninsula and the region; it is also a serious breach of the non-proliferation regime. Senegal therefore calls on the Democratic People's Republic of Korea to respect its international commitments and obligations.

In 2016, the Security Council unanimously adopted two resolutions — resolution 2270 (2016), on 2 March 2016, and 2321 (2016), on 30 November 2016 — which considerably strengthened previous sanctions against Pyongyang. Nonetheless, it must be pointed out that such measures, in addition to the unilateral sanctions imposed by some countries, have been unsuccessful in encouraging the country to abandon its military nuclear ambitions. In truth, none of those sanctions have prevented the Democratic People's Republic of Korea from continuing to gradually expand its nuclear capacity and increase its ballistic missiles arsenal, which is a flagrant violation of the Security Council's resolutions and its repeated requests. Senegal has ratified the main instruments underpinning international non-proliferation and nuclear security regime. It also respects States' obligations under resolution 1540 (2004), whose thirteenth anniversary is being celebrated today.

Similarly, Senegal has submitted its report on the implementation of the provisions of resolutions 1718 (2006), 1874 (2009), 2094 (2013) and 2270 (2016). My country is in the process of finalizing its report on resolution 2321 (2016), with a view to submitting it to the Chair of the Committee established pursuant to resolution 1718 (2006).

It is important that we urge the Democratic People's Republic of Korea to honour its obligations. Once again, before concluding, I would like to sincerely thank you, Sir, for your commitment and that of your country, through dialogue and diplomacy, to seek political negotiated solutions to the crises that disrupt the world's operations. My country's President lauds your efforts and commitment to find an unprecedented consensus required to put an end to the serious threats posed by the actions of the Democratic People's Republic of Korea.

Mr. Wang Yi (China) (*spoke in Chinese*): The continued escalation of tensions on the Korean peninsula in recent times has caused widespread concerns in the international community. If the tensions on the

peninsula are not kept under control, in particular in the case of unexpected events, it is highly likely that the situation will take a drastic turn for the worse and spiral out of control. There is no lack of such painful lessons in history; we must remain on high alert.

To that end, China believes that today's Security Council meeting is necessary. We thank Secretary-General Guterres for his briefing to the Council. We hope that the parties can reach consensus in order to fully implement Security Council resolutions related to the Democratic People's Republic of Korea, thereby intensifying efforts to promote peace talks to bring the nuclear issue on the Korean peninsula back on the path towards a negotiated solution. With regard to the nuclear issue on the peninsula, China's position is clear: no matter how the situation may develop, we must adhere to the following two basic paths.

First, we must remain committed to the goal of denuclearization, which is the basic precondition necessary for long-term peace and stability on the peninsula that we must achieve in order to safeguard the international nuclear non-proliferation regime. Come what may, we should never waver in our commitment to achieving that goal. To that end, China's position of opposing the Democratic People's Republic of Korea's research, development and possession of nuclear weapons remains rock solid. We are firmly committed to the implementation of all relevant Security Council resolutions. We urge the Democratic People's Republic of Korea to stop its nuclear- and missile-development activities, return to its commitment to denuclearization and honour its denuclearization obligations. At the same time, we also call on other parties concerned to demonstrate political wisdom, take political steps and work constructively together towards the denuclearization of the peninsula.

Secondly, we must remain committed to taking the path of resolving issues through dialogue and negotiations. The use of force does not solve differences and leads only to bigger disasters. As the only solution, dialogue and negotiations also represent the sensible choice for all parties. Our past experience with regard to resolving the nuclear issue on the peninsula has shown that whenever there is recourse to dialogue and negotiations, basic stability on the peninsula is maintained, and efforts towards denuclearization can yield results. During the five-year period from 2003 to 2007, when the parties were engaged in dialogue and negotiations, three joint documents were adopted. In

particular, the 19 September joint statement in 2005 set out the road map for the Democratic People's Republic of Korea's abandonment of all nuclear programmes and the realization of peace on the peninsula. Even today, the joint statement still carries major positive significance and has been reaffirmed and acknowledged by all Democratic People's Republic of Korea-related resolutions adopted by the Security Council.

Since dialogue and negotiations came to a halt in 2008, the situation on the peninsula has gradually spiralled out of control. The Democratic People's Republic of Korea has accelerated its nuclear-missile development process and conducted four nuclear tests and dozens of missile launches. We therefore hope that all parties will devote greater efforts to seeking a political settlement through dialogue and consultations, as required by the relevant Security Council resolutions. China is not a focal point for resolving the problem on the peninsula. The key to solving the nuclear issue on the peninsula does not rest in the hands of China. However, as a close neighbouring country to the peninsula, with a responsible attitude with regard to peace and stability there and in the region, China has made unrelenting efforts and played a unique role in promoting a negotiated solution of the issue over the years. Through China's efforts and the support of all parties, the three-party talks on the nuclear issue on the peninsula was expanded to include six parties.

In the current circumstances, China remains prepared to work with all parties to contribute anew to the settlement of the nuclear issue on the peninsula. In view of recent developments on the peninsula, China has put forward a double suspension proposal that builds on the dual-track approach, which we proposed earlier. The dual-track approach aims to promote parallel progress in the denuclearization of the peninsula and the establishment of a peace mechanism on the peninsula in a synchronized and reciprocal manner, thereby ultimately achieving both goals together. The double suspension proposal, which calls for the suspension of nuclear and missile activities by the Democratic People's Republic of Korea and the suspension of large-scale military exercises by the United States and the Republic of Korea, seeks to bring both sides back to the negotiating table, thereby initiating the first step of that approach.

China's proposals have taken into consideration both the short- and long-term goals, while making them complementary to one another. While they are designed

to address the most pressing concerns of the parties, they also pave the way towards denuclearization. They are consistent with the requirements of the relevant Security Council resolutions and the fundamental interests of all parties, including those of the United States and the Democratic People's Republic of Korea. The proposals are objective, impartial, reasonable and practical, and are gaining the understanding and support of an increasing number of countries. We, of course, also know that some countries might continue to have certain doubts.

I would like to point out that the most urgent task now is to stop the Democratic People's Republic of Korea's nuclear and missile development. To achieve that goal, it is necessary to put aside the debate over who should take the first step and stop arguing over who is right and wrong. Rather, we should start from the low-hanging fruits and remove flash points so as to engender peace on the peninsula and establish conditions conducive to stability in the region. In that regard, I also want to stress that the state of affairs of the peninsula issue is not caused by any one single party, and it is not realistic to ask one party alone to assume all the responsibilities in connection with resolving the issue. As President Xi Jinping said, only with all relevant parties shouldering their respective responsibilities and meeting one another half-way will there be a timely solution to the nuclear issue on the peninsula.

We call upon all parties, especially those directly concerned by the issue, namely, the Democratic People's Republic of Korea and the United States, to show a sincere desire for dialogue and restart the dialogue process. Furthermore, we look to the Council to build further consensus and speak with a more unified voice. At the same time, China will remain open to all useful proposals from the parties. All ideas conducive to resuming dialogue and negotiations aimed at achieving denuclearization and maintaining peace and stability on the peninsula are welcomed for consideration in our discussions.

As we meet for this special ministerial meeting of the Security Council, China calls on all parties to make concerted efforts to address two urgent tasks.

First, we call for a de-escalation of the situation on the peninsula as rapidly as possible. Given the gravity of the situation on the peninsula, China strongly urges all parties to remain calm, exercise restraint and avoid

provocative rhetoric or actions that could lead to a miscalculation. I want to stress that there is, and should be, no double standard with regard to this issue. While we demand that the Democratic People's Republic of Korea observe the relevant Security Council resolutions and stop advancing its nuclear and missile development, we also demand that the United States, the Republic of Korea and other parties refrain from conducting, or even expanding, military exercises directed against the Democratic People's Republic of Korea.

Secondly, all parties should comprehensively respect and fully implement the Democratic People's Republic of Korea-related Security Council resolutions. In addition to introducing sanctions on the Democratic People's Republic of Korea, the resolutions that have been adopted to date also call for resuming the Six-Party Talks, avoiding an escalation of tensions and committing to dialogue. In another words, imposing sanctions and resuming talks are both efforts to implement the relevant Security Council resolutions. We cannot choose one over the other, or implement only what we see fit. As a response to the accelerated progress of the Democratic People's Republic of Korea's nuclear and missile development, the international community needs to step up non-proliferation efforts. In response to the progressive escalation of tensions on the peninsula, it is also necessary for the parties to step up efforts to promote peace talks. Those two stepping-up actions can help promote the peaceful settlement of the nuclear issue on the peninsula. The Chinese word for crisis contains two characters, which respectively mean danger and opportunity. Danger embodies opportunity and engenders opportunity. In China's view, now is the time to seriously consider resuming talks.

Before concluding, I would like to reiterate China's firm opposition against the United States deployment of the Terminal High Altitude Area Defense system in the Republic of Korea. It is a move that seriously undermines the strategic security of China and other countries in the region and damages trust and cooperation among the parties in connection with the peninsula issue. It is detrimental to achieving denuclearization and maintaining long-term stability on the peninsula. China once again urges the relevant parties to immediately stop the deployment process.

Let us make joint efforts to promote denuclearization and uphold stability on the peninsula based on mutual respect and trust.

Mr. Johnson (United Kingdom): The Charter of the United Nations defines the supreme task of the Security Council as the maintenance of international peace and security. There could hardly be a clearer threat to world peace more demanding of a unified response than the activities of one Member of the United Nations, and that is North Korea breaking its treaty obligations, ignoring the will of the Council and making blood-curdling threats to inflict grievous harm on peoples of other countries.

For decades North Korea has doggedly pursued the means to act on those threats. In a nation where the entire gross domestic product is about \$25 billion, and where its people have over recent decades been exposed to terrible suffering and been reduced to eating the leaves and the bark of trees, the Pyongyang regime has devoted its energy to developing nuclear weapons and the missiles to convey them.

Last year alone, North Korea tested two nuclear devices and more than 24 ballistic missiles. This year we witnessed more missile tests, and I remind the Council that every one of those tests breaks seven United Nations resolutions stretching back to resolution 1695 (2006), which was adopted unanimously.

Therefore we should reject, I am afraid, any claims of moral equivalence between the actions of North Korea and the defensive and precautionary measures of other nations. The latter are legitimate; the former are not. In spite of the strenuous efforts of some to obscure that distinction, it cannot be ignored or elided. The United Kingdom therefore believes it is vital for the Council to stand ready to take further significant measures to bring about a peaceful resolution. Sooner or later the North Korean leadership must realize that their isolation not only holds back their own people — if the regime really cares about its own people — but also weakens their own grip on power. The Council must be united in its demand that the present course not continue. Today, Great Britain is proud to have joined its allies to lead the enforcement of sanctions and seek a peaceful solution.

We urge other partners with direct influence on North Korea to use that leverage to the full, with the aim of easing tensions and ensuring compliance with the expressed will of the United Nations. There is a vital role for China and Russia, both of whom are neighbours of North Korea with influence on Pyongyang and are permanent members of the Council. They have a

special responsibility to preserve international peace and security. The United Kingdom calls on Russia and China and other Member States to use whatever influence they possess to restrain North Korea and guide its leaders toward a peaceful settlement.

Last year the Council decided to toughen sanctions on North Korea, including by restricting the regime's access to foreign currency. However, the United Nations Panel of Experts has shown that not every Member State is fully enforcing those resolutions. Most Members of the United Nations have yet to obey the requirement in resolution 2270 (2016) to submit a national report on their implementation of sanctions. The United Kingdom believes that all Member States should reaffirm their commitment to enforcing United Nations sanctions against North Korea.

We also have no doubt that negotiations must at some point form part of the solution; but first it is reasonable to expect North Korea to make verifiable progress toward meeting its obligations to denuclearize the Korean peninsula. For, as long as Pyongyang continues to defy the Council, the conditions will not be helpful for the resumption of the Six-Party Talks or negotiations in any other format.

While the most pressing threat is North Korea's ballistic-missile and nuclear ambitions, we must never forget the horrifying abuse the regime metes out to its own people, as documented by the Commission of Inquiry on Human Rights in the Democratic People's Republic of Korea in 2014. The Council has discussed human rights in North Korea on previous occasions, and there should be no reticence about doing so. The United Kingdom fully supports the work of the Special Rapporteur on the situation of human rights in the Democratic People's Republic of Korea and the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights, both of which perform the crucial task of investigating and recording these violations.

Britain stands alongside our allies in making clear that North Korea must obey the United Nations and halt its nuclear-weapon and ballistic-missile programmes, disarming in a complete, verifiable and irreversible manner. Only then can the Council be assured of the peace and security of the region, and only then can the people of North Korea have the chance of a better future.

Mr. Gebeyehu (Ethiopia): We thank the United States presidency for organizing this high-level briefing meeting on an issue that has serious implications for

regional and international peace and security. We express our appreciation to the United States Secretary of State for presiding over this important meeting. We also thank the Secretary-General for his useful briefing.

We are indeed deeply concerned by the extremely tense situation prevailing in the Korean peninsula. No stone should be left unturned to de-escalate the situation. There is a real danger that it could get out of hand. That should never be allowed to happen; nor should the situation be allowed to spiral out of control.

The activities of the Democratic People's Republic of Korea are no doubt extremely dangerous. Ethiopia joins other members in once again reiterating its strong condemnation of the latest launches of ballistic missiles by the Democratic People's Republic of Korea, in violation of the numerous resolutions adopted by the Council. The need to find a lasting and comprehensive political and diplomatic solution to this long-standing issue through dialogue has never been more urgent than today. In that regard, compliance by the Democratic People's Republic of Korea with its international commitments on denuclearization, including full compliance with the relevant resolutions of the Security Council, is indeed indispensable. That would no doubt pave the way for a peaceful and comprehensive solution through dialogue. The Democratic People's Republic of Korea has the responsibility to do that. In the meantime, it is important to reduce the tension in the Korean peninsula in order to ensure that matters do not get out of hand by accident. But the Democratic People's Republic of Korea has to use the opportunity to avert what otherwise could be a slide into war from which no one would benefit.

The full implementation by Member States of the relevant Security Council resolutions on the Democratic People's Republic of Korea is also necessary. We believe there is an outreach activity by the Chair of the Security Council Committee established pursuant to resolution 1718 (2006) with different regional groups, which will contribute to the implementation of the sanctions regime against the Democratic People's Republic of Korea.

For our part, we have taken all the necessary measures to ensure that Ethiopia is in full compliance with all that is called for by the relevant Council resolutions imposing sanctions on the Democratic People's Republic of Korea. We will continue with resolve to meet our obligations in that regard.

I wish to conclude by reaffirming our commitment to fulfilling our obligations and to continuing to engage constructively with the Panel charged with the responsibility of monitoring the implementation of the sanctions regime imposed on the Democratic People's Republic of Korea. We look forward to the restoration of a trustworthy peace and security on the Korean peninsula. We all need that.

Mr. Abdrakhmanov (Kazakhstan): I would like to thank His Excellency Secretary of State Tillerson for convening today's debate on the Democratic People's Republic of Korea, which is a topic that has unfortunately become highly relevant in the light of recent events.

For the people and the Government of Kazakhstan, nuclear disarmament, non-proliferation and nuclear security have been essential priorities in our national policy since independence. From the time we joined the United Nations, in March 1992, my country has worked with steadfast determination to promote disarmament and non-proliferation globally. That is why I hope today's meeting will help the Security Council to come up with collective multilateral action to bring peace to the Korean peninsula and find ways to its achieve its denuclearization.

My country strongly believes that the Security Council, as the single body entrusted with maintaining international peace and security, should preserve its unity at this critical stage. In that regard, we welcome the Council's recent statement stressing the importance of working to reduce tensions on the Korean peninsula and beyond. We are all pained to see how the situation in and around the Korean peninsula has worsened with the passage of time, resulting in a complete impasse. It is worrisome that the Democratic People's Republic of Korea continues to launch ballistic missiles and conduct nuclear tests in flagrant violation of all relevant Security Council resolutions.

As one of the Chairs of the ninth Conference on Facilitating the Entry into Force of the Comprehensive Nuclear-Test-Ban Treaty (CTBT) and as the Chairman of The Hague Code of Conduct against Ballistic Missile Proliferation, my country makes every effort to promote the nuclear non-proliferation process. Five nuclear tests have been conducted so far, and a sixth could be around the corner, if we do not take real action aimed at defusing tensions. We therefore urge the Democratic People's Republic of Korea to refrain from actions that

have a negative impact on the nuclear-disarmament and non-proliferation process and pose a threat to both regional and global security.

We call on all Member States to strictly observe the sanctions regime put in place under all the relevant Security Council resolutions aimed at the denuclearization of the Democratic People's Republic of Korea, as well as under the CTBT, which calls upon all States to refrain from conducting any nuclear-weapon-test explosions or any other type of nuclear explosion and to maintain the moratoriums. In that regard, Kazakhstan co-sponsored resolutions 2270 (2016), 2310 (2016) and 2321 (2016).

The denuclearization of the Korean peninsula is a key element in preserving broader security across Asia and Central Asia. Possession of nuclear arms by the North Korean regime will create a precedent that will undoubtedly lead to an escalation of the regional arms race, given that parties might be tempted to engage in further proliferation in order to balance out the nuclear threat posed by the Democratic People's Republic of Korea.

We would like to remind the Council that the principal position of Kazakhstan is based not only on the most severe condemnation of the use of weapons of mass destruction by any party but also on the resolution of conflicts through dialogue and negotiations. I would like to inform the Council that Kazakhstan is still struggling with the devastating legacy of the Cold War, which is why the closure of the second-largest nuclear-test site and the renunciation of the world's fourth-largest nuclear arsenal remain among the proudest achievements of my country.

Soon, together with other sponsors, we are going to launch in Kazakhstan the first-ever International Atomic Energy Agency Low-Enriched Uranium Bank. As a non-permanent member of this organ, we bring the same passion and commitment to nuclear non-proliferation as one of the firm principles, goals and priorities underlying our work, as envisioned by my President, Mr. Nursultan A. Nazarbayev, in his address at the general debate of the General Assembly at its seventieth session (see A/70/PV.13) and in his manifesto entitled "The World. The Twenty-First Century".

I believe that all of the foregoing gives Kazakhstan the strong moral right to call upon all Member States — and first and foremost the Democratic People's Republic of Korea — to make every effort

to resolve this troublesome situation. Achieving this goal requires, above all, intensified dialogue among all stakeholders in regional and global security, and my country is ready to contribute to that end. My country's non-nuclear status is the most convincing example of how the non-nuclear approach to State development is the only promising one. We call on the Democratic People's Republic of Korea to opt for the same choice. It has been proved that there is no situation for which there is no peaceful solution, and North Korea is no exception.

As an example, in 2013, Kazakhstan's status as a trusted mediator allowed it to facilitate the talks on the Iranian nuclear programme, which consequently contributed to the resumption of negotiations between the P5+1 and Iran. We are convinced that there is no other option available to us but the collective commitment to international obligations taken in accordance with Security Council resolutions.

Kazakhstan believes that now is the right time and is ready to work with all Member States to eliminate the nuclear threat for the sake of our world. Complete nuclear disarmament and the Democratic People's Republic of Korea's giving up of its nuclear ambitions could be ensured by a truce backed by the permanent members of the Security Council, guaranteeing political and military stability on the peninsula. If it chooses the path of peaceful coexistence, the Democratic People's Republic of Korea will receive significant benefits resulting from closer engagement with the Asia-Pacific community.

Such an approach, combined with a comprehensive and holistic regional strategy, will ensure stability for the country, the peninsula and the wider subregion. We call upon all parties, all relevant stakeholders and all Member States to take balanced and thoughtful actions that do not lead to irreversible consequences. We call on all parties concerned to refrain from actions that could increase the risk of a military escalation and further tensions in the region.

Mr. Gatilov (Russian Federation) (*spoke in Russian*): There is no doubt that what we are living through at present is one of the most acute and dramatic phases of developments on the Korean peninsula. Without exaggeration, peace in the region recently underwent a serious test, and the threat of this confrontation moving into a hot phase was higher than ever, and it remains so today. The belligerent

rhetoric coupled with reckless muscle-flexing has led to a situation where the whole world is now seriously wondering whether there is going to be a war or not. As is well known, under the conditions of such tension, one ill-thought-out or misinterpreted step could lead to the most terrible and lamentable consequences.

In Russia, we are watching the dangerous development of the situation in the region with alarm, as we ourselves are part of the region. Of course, we are united in condemning the provocative nuclear-missile activity by Pyongyang, which over the past 18 months, it has taken on a very dangerous dynamic. We do understand very well the feelings of our neighbours when another missile is launched from North Korean territory without a notification, thereby subjecting the lives of people and maritime and aviation transport to disproportionate risks. We reject such activity by the Democratic People's Republic of Korea, which is confirmed by our support of the sanctions resolutions adopted by the Security Council, namely, resolutions 2270 (2016) and 2321 (2016).

We call upon the North Korean authorities to end their proscribed programmes, return to the non-proliferation regime and join once again the International Atomic Energy Agency verification regime. At the same time, it should be clear for everyone that the Democratic People's Republic of Korea will probably not give up its nuclear weapons as long as it sense that the existence of a direct threat to their security, which is exactly how the North Koreans view the regular large-scale manoeuvres and exercises by the United States and its allies in the region. That is how they view the dispatch of the American naval armada to the region that we have witnessed this month.

An additional destabilizing factor in the region is the decision — taken by Washington and Seoul last year in line with the wrong logic of creating a global missile defence system — to place on the territory of the Republic of Korea elements of the United States missile defence system known as the Terminal High Altitude Area Defense. We have said on many occasions that this step would not only, to put it mildly, not be viewed with enthusiasm by Pyongyang, but it would also undermine the existing military balance in the region, thereby jeopardizes the security of neighbouring States. We are not the only ones who view this in a negative way. Once again, we call upon the United States and the Republic of Korea to review the desirability of such a step, and we call upon other members in the region

to resist the temptation to become involved in such destabilizing efforts.

As for international sanctions against the Democratic People's Republic of Korea, we would like once again to reaffirm our commitment to their implementation. However, such measures should not be a goal in themselves, but rather an instrument to involve this country in constructive negotiations on existing issues. Resolving the nuclear issue of the Korean peninsula solely by imposing sanctions and placing pressure on Pyongyang is impossible.

Sanctions should not be used either economically to suffocate the Democratic People's Republic of Korea nor to worsen the humanitarian situation. This applies in particular to the illegitimate unilateral restrictions targeting civilian areas not associated with the country's nuclear missile programmes. Such sanctions are the reason for the serious deterioration in the living conditions of the North Korean people, which, incidentally, was identified as a cause for alarm in the most recent report of the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs. They are justifiably very almed about that. We must acknowledge that the humanitarian exemptions provided for by the Security Council's sanctions regime essentially do not work. Because of the ban on correspondent relations with the Democratic People's Republic of Korea, it is impossible to purchase abroad the goods and food stuffs necessary for the economy. Because of the way the financial and banking system works, it is very difficult to obtain funding for the United Nations humanitarian agencies that are still working in the country. Since Pyongyang cannot replenish its foreign currency reserves owing to the existing restrictions, it could find itself in a situation where it is impossible for it to give the United Nations the funds that are to be channelled to it, as permitted by the Committee.

A separate issue is the situation with regard to foreign diplomatic missions in Pyongyang. We should not allow a situation in which diplomatic missions continue to experience difficulties in carrying out their work because of the restrictions imposed on the country. We have repeatedly raised this issue at meetings of the Security Council Committee established pursuant to resolution 1718 (2006), but as a result of the obstructionist position taken by its individual members, the situation has not changed at all.

Undoubtedly, the Democratic People's Republic of Korea is conducting itself inappropriately. It refuses to abide by the laws of the international community, which are established in relevant Security Council resolutions. At the same time, the options for using force are completely unacceptable and can lead to catastrophic consequences for both the Korean peninsula and the region of North-East Asia as a whole. We should choose to use our diplomatic tools to the greatest extent possible. Under the current conditions, all parties involved should demonstrate calm and restraint and not take steps that could increase the tension.

We need to view the settlement of the situation in the context of the whole range of issues among the parties and thereby create the conditions for the denuclearization of the Democratic People's Republic of Korea. This is impossible without normalizing the overall military and political situation, putting an end to the build-up of military infrastructure, scaling down the manoeuvring and building trust among States in the region. We are convinced that there is no alternative to a political settlement of the nuclear issue on the Korean peninsula, on the basis of the joint statement issued on 19 September 2005 by the participants in the Six-Party Talks.

The Chinese proposals are in the same vein when they talk about suspension for suspension and parallel moves. These ideas deserve serious attention, as they could be a starting point for us to overcome the current impasse and renew the negotiating process. We need to seek channels of communication with the Democratic People's Republic of Korea authorities and lead them to a substantive dialogue on nuclear and missile issues.

As recent events have shown, under no circumstances can we allow the situation in the region to develop on its own. As the saying goes, even bad peace is better than a good quarrel. In that connection, we are ready for closer interaction with all partners in order to settle the nuclear and other issues on the Korean peninsula as soon as possible through the only means possible — namely, political and diplomatic means — through mutually respectful dialogue and mutual consideration of interests and concerns.

Ms. Söder (Sweden): First, let me express my gratitude to you, Mr. President, and to the United States presidency of the Security Council for convening this timely and important meeting. I also thank the Secretary-General for his briefing.

The situation on the Korean peninsula, particularly the pursuit of nuclear weapons and ballistic missiles by the Democratic People's Republic of Korea, is of great concern for the region and for our world more broadly. Tensions have risen in recent months and the potential for mistakes, misunderstandings and miscalculations is high. For this reason, it is important that the Security Council seize this opportunity to reflect on how tensions can be reduced and how the Council can facilitate a comprehensive solution to the situation.

Despite repeated unanimous condemnations by the Security Council and the adoption of a number of Security Council resolutions — which have led to the most rigorous sanctions regime under the United Nations system — the Democratic People's Republic of Korea persists in accelerating its nuclear weapons and ballistic missile programme. In doing so, the Democratic People's Republic of Korea continues to show blatant disregard for its international obligations and to threaten international peace and security. Its actions are also incompatible with the existing global norm against nuclear testing embodied in the Comprehensive Nuclear-Test-Ban Treaty, and they go against non-proliferation efforts. Therefore, we call on the Democratic People's Republic of Korea to take immediate steps towards a complete, verifiable and irreversible dismantlement of its nuclear weapons and missile programme. This will help pave the way for peaceful and prosperous development on the Korean peninsula. In addition, it is clear that there is a need for a regional security arrangement in the medium term to be able to realize this goal in full.

Meanwhile sanctions must be duly implemented to have the desired effect. This is also a matter of credibility for the entire United Nations system. Yet the implementation of the sanctions against the Democratic People's Republic of Korea remains insufficient and highly inconsistent, as highlighted in the latest report of the Panel of Experts to the Security Council Committee established pursuant to resolution 1718 (2006). The recommendations provided by the Panel must be followed up, and there is a need for a stronger political commitment by all United Nations Members in that regard. We need additional capacity at all levels to ensure better compliance with the letter and spirit of the resolutions adopted by the Council.

However, sanctions alone will not solve the situation on the Korean peninsula. Now diplomacy is crucial. Intensified and creative diplomatic efforts are

urgently needed to prepare for a peaceful, diplomatic and comprehensive solution. The press statement in response to the latest ballistic missile launch (SC/12801) confirms the continued commitment of the Council to dialogue.

The situation must be approached without prejudice and we must be prepared to consider both new and previous proposals and agreements. Sweden is ready to do its part to fulfil that goal.

Sweden, with its Embassy in Pyongyang, is the Power protecting the interests of the United States, Canada and Australia in the Democratic People's Republic of Korea. We are also a member of the Neutral Nations Supervisory Commission, and in that context we strongly encourage the Democratic People's Republic of Korea to resume contact and cooperation with the Commission at the border station in Panmunjom, which would also help to reduce tensions and increase trust and transparency.

Like other speakers, I would also like to take this opportunity to draw attention to the extremely worrying human rights situation and precarious humanitarian conditions in the Democratic People's Republic of Korea. It is the duty of all of us to continue to highlight the atrocities being committed by the regime against its own people, and the international community should continue to pursue accountability for those crimes, but we should also take into consideration the humanitarian situation of the people of the Democratic People's Republic of Korea so as to avoid increasing their suffering as we implement the sanctions.

The pursuit of the development and use of weapons of mass destruction represents one of the world's gravest threats to international peace and security. Preventing that is a crucial responsibility of the Security Council. There can be no military solution to the situation on the Korean peninsula, and we once again urge the Democratic People's Republic of Korea to re-engage in a credible and meaningful dialogue with the international community. We also urge ourselves, the international community, to be ready. In the meantime, Sweden will stand united with the members of the Council in condemning any action that jeopardizes international peace and security.

Mr. Della Vedova (Italy): I would first like to thank the presidency for convening this timely meeting on such a key and pressing issue for the Security Council. I believe that the Council should make every possible

effort to resolve the worsening crisis created by the persistent ambitions of the Democratic People's Republic of Korea to pursue a military nuclear programme.

Italy condemns in the strongest terms all the nuclear tests and ballistic-missile launches that the Democratic People's Republic of Korea has carried out. Its nuclear and ballistic-missile programmes pose a grave and increasing threat not only to regional and international peace and security but also to the global non-proliferation regime. We all share a common sense of urgency about the issue, since we assume, rightly in my view, that with its tests and launches the Democratic People's Republic of Korea is advancing its military nuclear technology and capability. Such progress represents an exceptionally high threat to the international community. For that reason, Italy will continue to fully support the implementation of an effective sanctions regime as a tool aimed at producing a change of behaviour in the leadership of the Democratic People's Republic of Korea. We are also ready to strengthen the sanctions regime if there should be additional nuclear tests or it should prove necessary in order to enable us reach the objective of a peaceful and comprehensive solution to the issue.

We firmly believe that the consistent and full implementation of the sanctions is the only way to make them effective in the framework of a comprehensive strategy for long-term peace and security. In that regard, I would like to recall the words of the Panel of Experts in February when they stated that the implementation of the sanctions regime is still insufficient and highly inconsistent, while "[a]ll Member States should reaffirm their commitment to rigorous enforcement of United Nations sanctions" (*S/2017/150, annex*). But the sanctions must continue to be part of a broader strategy, not an end in themselves. Such a regime requires Member States' good-faith awareness and dedication. As Chair of the Committee established pursuant to resolution 1718 (2006), Italy is committed to helping all States Members of the United Nations fully implement the relevant Security Council resolutions, particularly resolutions 2270 (2016) and 2321 (2016). To that end, we held an open briefing in February, and beginning in March, in cooperation with the Panel of Experts, we have been holding a set of outreach meetings with United Nations regional groups, two of which — with the Groups of Latin American and Caribbean and Eastern European States — have already taken place. The meeting with the Group of African States will be

held on 1 May, while those with the Groups of Western European and other and Asia-Pacific States will take place by the end of May.

As Secretary Tillerson said, our collective actions are not aimed at the people of North Korea but rather at a regime that should put the interests and well-being of its people above any considerations of military power. The Council's resolutions are clear in that regard, and as Chair of the Sanctions Committee, we take great care to avoid any unintended consequences for the civilian population of the country.

Italy reaffirms the goal of achieving a diplomatic solution to North Korea's threats involving weapons of mass destruction. We firmly believe that while the Democratic People's Republic of Korea blatantly disregards its international obligations with its nuclear and missile programmes, they do not serve its own security goals. On the contrary, we believe it could meet its security needs much more effectively by abiding by its international obligations under the relevant Security Council resolutions and its commitments under the Joint Statement of the Six-Party Talks of September 2005. Furthermore, at this time, a few weeks from the commencement of the next review cycle of the Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons (NPT), Italy reiterates its demand that the Democratic People's Republic of Korea return to compliance with the NPT and the International Atomic Energy Agency safeguards.

Lastly, I would like to underline that the Democratic People's Republic of Korea's illegal nuclear and missile programmes represent a deplorable diversion of crucial resources that should be devoted to the primary needs of its people. By immediately ending its nuclear and ballistic-missile programmes, we believe that the Democratic People's Republic of Korea would create the conditions for its reintegration into the international community and opportunities to improve its economy and its people's standard of living.

Mr. Yelchenko (Ukraine): North Korea's advancing nuclear and ballistic-missile programmes represent the most urgent nuclear-proliferation challenge of our time, and I therefore thank the United States presidency and you personally, Sir, for convening today's ministerial meeting on a very topical issue. I would also like to thank the Secretary-General for his useful update.

Ukraine continues to condemn in the strongest terms Pyongyang's persistent illegal activities in its

efforts to develop nuclear-missile capabilities, in gross violation of its international obligations. They have already seriously undermined the non-proliferation regime as a whole. Despite immense political and diplomatic efforts, the nuclear threat to the region is growing. Regrettably, we have seen no signs that the Democratic People's Republic of Korea intends to change its behaviour. What we have seen is the alarming persistence, not to say ever-growing obsessiveness, of the North Korean leadership. As a result, the whole world faces the gloomy prospect of a large-scale military confrontation, with unpredictable consequences.

We all agree that the existing challenges related to the nuclear and missile ambitions of the Democratic People's Republic of Korea should be addressed collectively, decisively and without any further delay.

Apparently, the existing sanctions regime is not effective enough to prevent the Democratic People's Republic of Korea from acquiring technologies, materials, equipment and financial resources for the further development of its nuclear and missile programmes. Sadly, we are witnessing a steady evolution of North Korean tricks to evade sanctions. It has been proven many times, most recently by the pictures of a military parade in Pyongyang, with a whole range of new weaponry that had never been seen before. We all know that the North Korean regime continues to build up its military arsenal at the expense of its own people. The impact of diverting resources has already produced a downward spiral in the steady deterioration of the quality of life for ordinary citizens. But does the regime care? Absolutely not.

Ukraine's stance in this regard has been consistent. The Council should find ways to increase international pressure on the North Korean regime to respond to its reckless, unabated behaviour. We believe that only robust steps by the Council can put an end to the systematic and brutal violations of international law and eradicate the growing nuclear threat in South-East Asia. We must not allow Pyongyang to continue discrediting the role of the Security Council in the context of global non-proliferation efforts. What could be the ways to effectively curb the North Korean nuclear threat? You clearly outlined them, Sir, in your own statement.

First, undoubtedly, unconditional and faithful compliance with the Security Council's resolutions is a key prerequisite to lowering the level of the threat in the region and to preventing new provocations. Yet, the

Council may have to take additional, robust measures with a view to compelling the Democratic People's Republic of Korea to abandon its prohibited activities. That includes the development of nuclear weapons, ballistic missiles and other types of weapons of mass destruction. We need to use every tool and avenue at the disposal of Council members to contribute to de-escalating the current highly volatile situation.

Secondly, we fully recognize the necessity of further fostering neighbouring States' defence capabilities against this threat. In this regard, I wish to reiterate that Ukraine stands firmly by the side of Japan, the Republic of Korea and other countries that are facing the growing nuclear threat.

Thirdly, it is high time to consider what we can do to prevent any nuclear threat in the future in any part of the globe. Are we able to assess the whole range of real challenges to the non-proliferation regime in order to avoid disaster in the future? The forthcoming review cycle of the Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons will be a suitable platform to that end. In this regard, I need to underscore the following.

Disrespect for international law and attempts to undermine or change the established world order are becoming more systematic nowadays. North Korean actions are a testament to this trend, but not the only one. The erosion of the existing system of international security, continuous breaches and unaddressed violations of international law pose a significant threat to all humankind. It is therefore the ultimate responsibility of the Security Council to spare no effort to restore respect for those norms, ensure the fulfillment of international commitments and obligations, and prevent further violations.

As a country that voluntarily renounced its own nuclear arsenal and has strictly abided by its obligations related to the non-proliferation of nuclear materials, technologies and their means of delivery, we are convinced that a world without nuclear weapons should remain a real policy goal for all concerned parties and not a theoretical concept that is sneered at by some. If nuclear Powers are serious about nuclear non-proliferation and eventual disarmament, they could strengthen the global non-proliferation regime immensely by making nuclear disarmament a success story.

Based on Ukraine's experience of confronting aggression from a nuclear State, this aspect is of

particular importance to my country. The brutal violation of international obligations, including under the 1994 Budapest Memorandum, by a permanent member of the Council that put its signature to the assurances of sovereignty and territorial integrity of Ukraine, contravenes the whole United Nations-based security system created after the Second World War. The international community has a collective responsibility to restore respect for international law and to find lasting solutions to the most urgent threats to global peace and security.

The North Korea issue is a test case for all of us today. Our success in resolving it may open ways to address other pressing problems on the world stage.

Mr. Rosselli (Uruguay) (*spoke in Spanish*): I would like to first thank Mr. Rex Tillerson, Secretary of State of the United States, for presiding over this briefing and to Secretary-General António Guterres for his comments.

We are thankful to the presidency of the Security Council for having organized this open briefing, which is of particular importance at a moment when tensions in the Korean peninsula have risen to unprecedented levels. I recall that, last year, my delegation requested on more than one occasion the convening of an open meeting of the Security Council to address this matter, on the understanding that such a meeting could contribute in some way to enhance the way the Organization deals with this particular item. I am pleased to note that, several months later, the Council is finally addressing the situation in an open meeting.

Uruguay is a non-nuclear-weapon State. It is a member of the first nuclear weapon-free zone, established by the Treaty of Tlatelolco, and an adherent to the Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons. It is therefore strongly committed strengthening the ruling of disarmament and non-proliferation regime and consistently advocates for a world free of nuclear weapons. Uruguay's foreign policy hinges on the essential principles of international law, including the prohibition of the use of the force in international relations and recourse to peaceful means to settle disputes. The use or threat of use of nuclear weapons constitutes a crime against humanity and a serious violation of international law, including international humanitarian law, as well as of the Charter of the United Nations. The only guarantee

against the use or threat of the use of these weapons is their explicit prohibition and total elimination.

Uruguay has expressed its firm condemnation of the nuclear tests and ballistic missile launches carried out by the Democratic People's Republic of Korea and will continue to do so if the North Korean regime continues to challenge and ignore the prescriptions of the Security Council by persisting in its nuclear and ballistic missiles programme. The actions of that country not only heighten tensions in the Korean peninsula, but also constitute a violation of international law and the resolutions of the Security Council and a serious threat to international peace and security. Uruguay therefore urges the Democratic People's Republic of Korea to abandon its existing nuclear programmes completely, verifiably and irreversibly and immediately to end all related activities, including launches using ballistic missile technology and other acts of provocation. We also urge that country to return to the Non-Proliferation Treaty and the safeguards regime of the International Atomic Energy Agency.

Uruguay has maintained a position on this issue that supports all initiatives favouring dialogue. It therefore believes that efforts to relaunch talks in the Korean peninsula should be intensified, generating confidence between the parties so as to return the North Korean Government to the negotiation table and undertake serious denuclearization negotiations. In times of high tension, it is necessary to remain calm, avoid unilateral actions and focus on the solution of the problem. In that connection, I recall paragraphs 47 and 48 of resolution 2321 (2016), adopted by the Security Council in November, wherein the Council reaffirms its support for the Six-Party Talks, calls for their resumption, and refers to the objective of the verifiable denuclearization of the Korean peninsula in a peaceful manner. We also reiterate the importance of maintaining peace and stability in the Korean peninsula and in North-East Asia as a whole, and of reducing tensions in the Korean peninsula and outside of it.

Uruguay has insisted on the urgent need to break the vicious cycle of the Democratic People's Republic of Korea violating resolutions of the Security Council, which in turn imposes sanctions, issues communiqués and reiterates that it is the responsibility of powerful States to open avenues for negotiation to resolve the situation. Uruguay is of the view that only dialogue, negotiation and political engagement can resolve the North Korean matter. In that regard, my country

reaffirms its readiness to continue working within the Security Council in order to reach a peaceful, diplomatic and political solution that will result in the denuclearization of the Korean peninsula.

Mr. Delattre (France) (*spoke in French*): I would like to thank the United States presidency of the Security Council for having taken the initiative of convening this important meeting. I extend a warm welcome to the Secretary of State of the United States, Mr. Rex Tillerson, and to the Secretary-General.

I have the honour of delivering a statement from the French Minister of Foreign Affairs and International Development, Mr. Jean-Marc Ayrault, who was held up at a conference in Europe and could not be here with us today in New York.

"France is particularly concerned over North Korea's nuclear and ballistic missile programme, which fuels the greatly heightened tensions in the Korean peninsula and constitutes one of the primary threats to international peace and security today. Methodically pursuing that path — initiated at highest level of power — over the course of several years with a view to obtaining an operational nuclear arsenal, North Korea has flouted all of the Council's prohibitions and ignored the repeated demands of the entire international community to desist from doing so.

"We are seeing the constant and rapid advancement of North Korea's proliferation programmes, which is bringing it ever closer to reaching operational capacity. That situation is unacceptable. France has systematically and firmly condemned each act carried out and has called on North Korea to abandon its attempts to develop a nuclear weapon. We once again make that appeal. This headlong rush forward cannot continue. It feeds a dangerous and provocative downward spiral and is an ongoing threat to the non-proliferation regime. That is why we must react to all such activities and recall the norm of the non-proliferation regime in order to avoid sending a message of impunity to States that would be tempted to follow the same irresponsible and provocative strategy.

"We are also concerned about the re-emergence of chemical weapons in the region, the 13 February attack in Malaysia should alert us to a global context of chemical weapons resurfacing and to Syria's continuous and repeated violations of the ban on

the use of such weapons. Let us be clear — the goal of North Korea is to become a nuclear-weapon State and to shake up strategic balances in the Far East and the entire world by directly threatening the security of all. Tomorrow, all countries could be in range of North Korean missiles. We must all be cognizant of the urgency of the situation. We must meet our responsibilities as members of the Security Council and show our determination to combatting those unjustifiable acts.

"We also recall that the development of nuclear and ballistic programmes is being carried out at the expense of the people of North Korea, who are victims of grave violations of human rights and 70 per cent of whom suffer from food insecurity. Those systematic and severe violations are the expression of utter totalitarianism, where the arbitrary use of power prevails systematically over the rule of law. The world cannot remain complacent with regard to that situation, which flies in the face of everything we have patiently worked to build, especially here at the United Nations. Confronted with such a challenge, the commitment of the international community and the Security Council must be firm, clear and visible. Our objective must be the total denuclearization of the Korean peninsula.

"The Council has taken bold action in response to the irresponsible actions of Pyongyang by condemning nuclear tests and ballistic missile tests, and it has imposed an extensive and coherent sanctions regime. Those measures have been bolstered following each nuclear test and, on two occasions in 2016, resulted in resolutions 2270 (2016) and 2321 (2016). France, which contributed to their adoption, welcomed those resolutions. As with the case of Iran, the sanctions are certainly not a goal in and of themselves, but rather one of the means to make North Korea see reason and accept the denuclearization of the peninsula.

"However, we regret the uneven implementation of those sanctions, which significantly undermines the effectiveness of the actions of the international community. France calls on all States without exception to ensure the rigorous and unconditional implementation of Council decisions by all actors, pursuant to the Charter of the United Nations. I am well aware of the technical and practical obstacles to their implementation, and it is up to the Council

to continue to provide assistance in that regard to countries to countries that need it.

"In the face of North Korea's persistent proliferation efforts and the growing danger it poses to peace and security, our position must be resolute and clear. If Pyongyang continues its provocations, the international community and the Security Council must be ready to adopt new measures. North Korea must be aware that the pursuit of its nuclear programme and the carrying out of additional tests will be met with strong action, namely through the imposition of new sanctions, while its citizens continue to be victims of its leaders.

"But our action cannot be merely reactionary. We must be proactive and act urgently before North Korea obtains an operational nuclear weapon. The international community must jointly and immediately coordinate efforts to bring greater diplomatic and economic pressure to bear upon North Korea in order for it to abandon its proliferation activities. The resumption of talks in order to reach a negotiated solution is also important, but requires that North Korea first make a good will commitment to them and abandon its nuclear objectives.

"France, as a permanent member of the Security Council and the European Union, is fully committed to ensuring that the United Nations and Europe respond appropriately to this unacceptable threat to international peace and security."

Mr. Llorentty Soliz (Bolivia) (*spoke in Spanish*): Bolivia thanks the presidency of the Security Council for having convened this meeting. We also wish to thank Secretary-General António Guterres for his briefing.

Bolivia wishes to stress the primary purpose of the Charter of the United Nations to act jointly and effectively to prevent and eliminate threats or breaches of peace, to suppress acts of aggression and to settle disputes peacefully and in line with the principles of justice and international law. The Plurinational State of Bolivia, in keeping with its political constitution, affirms its peaceful vocation and rejects all acts of aggression as means to settle disputes and conflicts among peoples and States. In that regard, the Government of President Evo Morales has created a policy of rejecting all confrontation, armed or otherwise.

In order to avoid armed confrontation, we think it is essential to advance towards the priority objective of global nuclear disarmament. Latin America and the Caribbean, my region, became a nuclear-weapon-free zone after the signing of the Treaty for the Prohibition of Nuclear Weapons in Latin America and the Caribbean 50 years ago, thereby becoming the first nuclear-weapon-free zone.

In that respect, and following the same line of thought on non-proliferation, we reiterate our strongest rejection and condemnation of the launching of ballistic missiles and the carrying out of nuclear tests by the Democratic People's Republic of Korea, the most recent of which took place on 15 April. This attitude represents a threat to international peace and security, and we therefore call for unity on the part of the Security Council in addressing this situation. Compliance with the resolutions of the Council is crucial in order to meet this objective.

Likewise, we would recall that sanctions are not an end in themselves but, rather, a means of achieving an objective. As recalled at the recent meeting of Ministers for Foreign Affairs of the Group of 77, Bolivia also rejects unilateral sanctions in this case, as in others, and for that reason believes that the Council, through multilateral mechanisms, must take the necessary action.

In recent weeks, the world has witnessed escalating tensions owing both to the tests carried out by the Democratic People's Republic of Korea and to the military deployment of the United States. The current situation can be considered as posing the greatest threat of nuclear war in this century. We urge all parties involved to avoid any escalation of rhetoric or actions that would increase tensions and endanger international peace and security, especially on the Korean peninsula.

In that respect, we support China's proposal of a simultaneous halt aimed at defusing the crisis in the Korean peninsula. The Democratic People's Republic of Korea must abandon its nuclear-test and ballistic-missile programmes, and the United States must refrain from carrying out military exercises in the region. The parties involved must resume negotiations, keeping in mind that the Six-Party Talks represent the most appropriate forum to that end. It is also crucial that the countries of the region take part in the negotiations in a positive spirit that would make it possible to ease current tensions.

The only solution to this conflict is a political solution. We must rule out once and for all any military alternative. In the current high-tension situation, reason must prevail, and we must refrain from taking any stance that could lead to provocations or misunderstandings. Priority must be attached to respect for the dignity and equality of peoples as well as to the lives of the inhabitants of our planet.

War is a failure of the Council. War is a failure of policy. War is a failure of diplomacy. We have the internationally recognized obligation to negotiate. I reiterate: we have the internationally recognized obligation to negotiate. We must eschew belligerent lines of thought and approaches, because once we have unleashed the demons of war, the only ones who benefit are those who profit from it.

Mr. Aboulatta (Egypt) (*spoke in Arabic*): Allow me at the outset to thank the Secretary-General, Mr. António Guterres, for his valuable briefing before the Council today and especially for his vision, which takes into consideration in a balanced manner all the dimensions of the issue under discussion today.

The current situation on the Korean peninsula poses a major challenge to the Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons (NPT) regime. Egypt is deeply concerned at the increasing tensions following recent developments, which have become one of the gravest threats to international peace and security.

Egypt reiterates its full support for all efforts aimed at reaching a peaceful solution to the crisis involving the Democratic People's Republic of Korea's nuclear programme and at achieving sustainable peace on the Korean peninsula, including all reunification efforts. Given the unique historical ties between Egypt and the peoples of North-East Asia, Egypt calls once again on the Democratic People's Republic of Korea to comply fully with all of its international commitments, under the relevant Security Council resolutions, to abandon its nuclear-weapons programme and to rejoin the Non-Proliferation Treaty as a non-nuclear State, without delays or preconditions.

Egypt is committed to taking every step necessary at the national level to implement all Security Council sanctions related to the Democratic People's Republic of Korea. Egypt calls on the international community and the Security Council to address all challenges to the NPT comprehensively and without selectivity or double standards. This is vital if we are to preserve the

credibility and effectiveness of the non-proliferation regime and the relevant Council resolutions, including resolution 687 (1991), especially in the light of the continued erosion of the credibility of the regime, which is the cornerstone of the wider international security architecture.

The continued erosion of the NPT's credibility and effectiveness became clear when a certain number of States decided, with no clear justification, to prevent the NPT review process from achieving any objective results by breaking the consensus reached by the majority of State parties. This was done in the service of political agendas that run counter to State party obligations under the NPT and to the unified message that we should all send, namely, that the international community is committed to achieving the universality of the Treaty and to dealing with all nuclear non-proliferation and disarmament challenges in a comprehensive and balanced manner, without any selectivity.

In closing, we encourage all parties to exercise self-restraint and to resume talks to reach a peaceful settlement as soon as possible. In this regard, we call on the Democratic People's Republic of Korea to respond to the calls made for the resumption of the talks and to cease any activities that might lead to further tension or escalation. We also urge all other international stakeholders to create the conditions necessary for an agreed settlement that would ensure regional and international peace and security in a manner consistent with the goals and principles of the United Nations and the NPT.

Egypt stands ready to make every possible effort to support such a peaceful settlement to the crisis and to maintain peace and security in the region and beyond.

The President: I now give the floor to the representative of the Republic of Korea.

Mr. Yun Byung-se (Republic of Korea): Let me join others in thanking Secretary Tillerson for having convened this very timely meeting and Secretary-General Guterres for his comprehensive briefing. This ministerial meeting of the Security Council, the first ever on the denuclearization of North Korea, demonstrates the sense of gravity and urgency shared by all members of the international community.

North Korea is now at the final stage of nuclear weaponization and claims to be a nuclear-weapon

State, as it has declared in its amended Constitution. Since the first North Korean nuclear crisis, a quarter-century ago, North Korea has made huge advances in all areas of its nuclear-weapons and missile programmes through five nuclear tests and numerous missile launches. We have witnessed, first, exponential growth in its nuclear stockpile — from what used to be a few kilograms of plutonium, back in 1992, to a significant nuclear arsenal now. Secondly, we have seen rapid development of ballistic missiles of all types and ranges, which now threaten to reach every corner of the world. And, finally, we have witnessed its willingness to actually use weapons of mass destruction (WMD), as manifested in the assassination of the North Korean leader's half-brother with a chemical weapon. In brief, North Korea's WMD capability, coupled with the intent to actually use them, bring us ever so closer to the tipping point. It is no wonder that some experts say the world is facing its greatest nuclear emergency since the Cuban missile crisis.

A nuclear-armed North Korea will significantly disrupt the security landscape in North-East Asia and in the world. It will also deal a fatal blow to the global regime based on the Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons and increase the risk of North Korean nuclear material or related technology falling into the hands of terrorists. In order to avoid that nightmarish scenario, we must act now. We are racing against time.

What should our response be? Extraordinary circumstances require extraordinary responses. A pundit once said, "Insanity is doing the same thing over and over again and expecting different results". What we need is a new approach led by the Security Council, not allowing North Korea to dictate the agenda and timeline. Resolutions 2270 (2016) and 2321 (2016) are milestone measures that illustrate such a new approach. Based on those most comprehensive and robust resolutions, the international community has built and solidified a united front against North Korea over the past year. For its part, my Government also took a series of unilateral measures in line with the Council's efforts. We are seeing evidence that sanctions are biting, by cutting off North Korea's hard-currency income, deepening Pyongyang's diplomatic isolation and blocking its illicit activities on all fronts. The international community must sustain efforts to thoroughly implement those resolutions.

Moreover, the Security Council must discuss additional punitive measures to take against future

provocations — proactively, not reactively, as was the case up until now. The Council has repeatedly warned that it will take further significant measures, including sanctions, in the case of future provocations. But Pyongyang may still harbour the illusion that the Security Council will take only limited action and that it can disregard and ridicule the authority of the United Nations.

In order to change such strategic calculus by Pyongyang and induce changes from within, we could take potent measures such as halting the export and supply of crude oil to North Korea; completely cutting off North Korea's hard-currency earnings by, for instance, suspending all imports of coal from North Korea; and seriously considering whether North Korea, a serial offender, is qualified as a Member of the United Nations, as well as downgrading diplomatic relations with North Korea.

Let me be clear: our goal is not to bring North Korea to its knees, but to bring it back to the negotiating table for genuine denuclearization. We must be clear-eyed about Pyongyang's intent. It is not interested in negotiating for denuclearization. Instead, its game plan is to be recognized as a nuclear-weapon State and to negotiate nuclear disarmament as such. Just last week, the North Korean Deputy Permanent Representative to the United Nations himself made clear that any denuclearization talks were a non-starter.

Under those circumstances, dialogue for the sake of dialogue cannot be an option. If history teaches us anything, it is that we must not repeat the tried-and-failed approach. Over the past 20 or so years, we have left no stone unturned. Yet countless negotiations and agreements with this rule-breaker par excellence have led us nowhere but back to square one due to North Korea's reneging and deception. They have only bought time for the regime to advance its WMD capabilities. We must once and for all break this vicious cycle of provocations-negotiations-provocations and rewarding North Korea's bad behaviour. Our goal is not to compromise on half-measures for a bogus peace. Our goal is the complete, verifiable and irreversible dismantlement of the North Korean nuclear weapons and missile programmes.

Finally, in dealing with the North Korean nuclear issue, we must not lose sight of another serious threat, emanating from North Korea's chemical and biological weapons programmes. Resolution 2270 (2016) decided

that North Korea shall abandon all chemical and biological weapons and weapons-related programmes. In that regard, I welcome the joint letter by Secretary-General Guterres and Director-General Üzümcü of the Organization for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons calling upon North Korea to accede to the Chemical Weapons Convention.

History tells us how in the first half of the twentieth century the failure to counter Nazi ambitions led to the outbreak of the Second World War. If we do not respond to North Korea's repeated provocations in a resolute manner, we will only further fuel the appetite of the trigger-happy regime in Pyongyang. In that regard, should North Korea conduct a sixth nuclear test or launch an intercontinental ballistic missile, it will be a game-changer for all of us. That is why it is critical that this time the entire international community continue to maintain the unprecedented unified front against North Korea. This is the last opportunity to break and reverse the process. The heavy responsibility is incumbent upon all of us.

With regard to the deployment of the Terminal High Altitude Defense battery system in my country, it is purely a defensive measure in the face of such a threat from North Korea. It is not aimed at any third country. Furthermore, the annual United States-South Korea military exercise is a defensive and transparent exercise. It cannot be on a par with North Korea's obligations under Security Council resolutions.

As this is my last appearance in the Security Council, I would like to take this opportunity to express my deepest gratitude for the unflinching support that members of the Security Council have rendered to me and to my Government over the past four years in confronting North Korea's nuclear and missile challenges. I assure members that the Republic of Korea will continue to be a stalwart partner in the Council's efforts to safeguard international peace and security.

The President: I shall now make a further statement in my capacity as Secretary of State of the United States.

First, I appreciate all of the statements that have been made. I have received those statements in the constructive spirit in which I know they were offered.

I also want to acknowledge the presence of a large number of Ambassadors with us today. Their presence gives strength to the importance of this issue and is a visible demonstration of the importance of this issue to the international community. I welcome their presence and appreciate their being here.

As stressed repeatedly in many of the statements today, North Korea has failed to honour its commitments of the past. It has made promises that it has broken. Had this body fully enforced and stood behind the resolutions it enacted in the past, vigorously enforcing sanctions with full compliance, perhaps we would not have found ourselves confronted with the high level of tension we face today.

We will not negotiate our way back to the negotiating table with North Korea. We will not reward their violations of past resolutions. We will not reward their bad behaviour with talks. We will engage in talks with North Korea only when they exhibit a good-faith commitment to abiding by Security Council resolutions and their past promises to end their nuclear programmes.

That is why we must have full and complete compliance by every country with the resolutions that have been enacted by this body in the past — no relaxation in the vigorous implementation of sanctions. And we have called for those sanctions to be extended to other areas as well, on a voluntary basis, and we are calling globally for all countries to participate in exerting pressure on North Korea. That is the way you make your voice heard, through action. Any failure to take action diminishes your vote for these resolutions of the past. It diminishes your vote for future resolutions. And it devalues your seat at the Council. We must have full, complete compliance by all members of the Council.

I now resume my functions as President of the Council.

The meeting rose at 12.10 p.m.



Security Council

Seventy-second year

Provisional

7933rd meeting

Friday, 28 April 2017, 6 p.m.

New York

President: Ms. Sison (United States of America)

Members:

Bolivia (Plurinational State of)	Mr. Llorentty Soliz
China	Mr. Zhang Dianbin
Egypt	Mr. Kandeel
Ethiopia	Mr. Alemu
France	Mr. Delattre
Italy	Mr. Cardi
Japan	Mr. Kawamura
Kazakhstan	Mr. Akylbayev
Russian Federation	Mr. Iliichev
Senegal	Mr. Ciss
Sweden	Mr. Skau
Ukraine	Mr. Yelchenko
United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland . .	Mr. Wilson
Uruguay	Mr. Rosselli

Agenda

The situation concerning Western Sahara

Report of the Secretary-General on the situation concerning Western Sahara
(S/2017/307)

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The meeting was called to order at 6.15 p.m.

Adoption of the agenda

The agenda was adopted.

The situation concerning Western Sahara

Report of the Secretary-General on the situation concerning Western Sahara (S/2017/307)

The President: The Security Council will now begin its consideration of the item on its agenda.

Members of the Council have before them document S/2017/362, which contains the text of a draft resolution submitted by the United States of America.

I wish to draw the attention of Council members to document S/2017/307, which contains the report of the Secretary-General on the situation concerning Western Sahara.

The Council is ready to proceed to the vote on the draft resolution before it. I shall put the draft resolution to the vote now.

A vote was taken by show of hands.

In favour:

Bolivia (Plurinational State of), China, Egypt, Ethiopia, France, Italy, Japan, Kazakhstan, Russian Federation, Senegal, Sweden, Ukraine, United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland, United States of America and Uruguay

The President: The draft resolution received 15 votes in favour. The draft resolution has been adopted unanimously as resolution 2351 (2017).

I shall now make a statement in my capacity as representative of the United States of America.

Ambassador Haley would have liked to have been here for this important adoption — an adoption during our presidency in which we emphasized one of our key peacekeeping principles, that peacekeeping missions should support political solutions. Our postponement of the adoption was key to allowing the United Nations and the United Nations Mission for the Referendum in Western Sahara (MINURSO) to close out the past year's chapter in the Western Sahara, illustrating in real time the value of the United Nations and of the Mission.

I should like to take a moment now to recognize the Personal Envoy to the Secretary-General for Western Sahara, Chris Ross, for his eight years of service. The United States is grateful for his tireless efforts to support a political process for Western Sahara. We look forward to the appointment of a new envoy and his travel to the region as quickly as possible. We also thank the Special Representative of the Secretary-General for Western Sahara, Kim Bolduc, for all her work managing the peacekeeping mission.

The United States is pleased with the adoption of today's mandate renewal for two reasons.

First, resolution 2351 (2017) helps put the Council's attention back where it belongs, supporting a political process to resolve the conflict in Western Sahara. For years, the United Nations and the Council have been bogged down. On the ground, peacekeepers have faced an almost endless series of frustrating obstructions, which often require months or even years of high-level engagement to sort out. Here in the Council, we often end up in debates about hyperspecific operational problems.

This situation needs to change. Of course, the parties need to let the Mission do its job without interference, and they need to respect all existing agreements. That is the bare minimum of what we must expect, but the Council also has to look at the big picture on Western Sahara. The big picture is that we have not seen significant political progress for years. That is the fundamental problem we need to address in the months to come. The United States therefore fully supports the Secretary-General's call to relaunch negotiations with a new dynamic and a new spirit. The resolution reinforces the fact that the Security Council shares the Secretary-General's goals. It shows that we expect the parties to work with the United Nations to come back to the table. As the resolution demands, the Secretary-General will now be reporting on whether we have seen progress. The Council will be watching what the parties do closely.

Secondly, the resolution sets a new standard for the performance of the Mission. We are asking the United Nations to set clear and measurable benchmarks for what the Mission and its staff will achieve. The Mission needs to be able to hire staff with the right skills to be as effective as possible and to adjust components that are not working as well as they could be. That may sound like common sense, but we do not always see it happening on the ground. We look forward to the

United Nations reporting back to the Council on how the Mission does.

Making sure that peacekeeping missions have an impact is a top priority for the United States. With today's resolution, we take another step towards that goal. The United States will be watching closely to see what progress is being made on the ground. MINURSO must be part of a broader effort to achieve a mutually acceptable resolution of the conflict in Western Sahara. Returning to negotiations will, of course, be a difficult task, but the United States is committed to doing what we can to facilitate the United Nations work. Let us not be distracted from our goal of finding a mutually acceptable political solution to the conflict that will provide for the self-determination of the people of Western Sahara.

We continue to view Morocco's autonomy plan as serious, credible and realistic, and it represents one potential approach to satisfying the aspirations of the people in Western Sahara to run their own affairs in peace and dignity. Again, we expect the parties to work with the United Nations to come back to the table and we call on all members of the Council to focus on finding an enduring peace for a conflict that has continued for far too long.

I now resume my functions as President of the Security Council.

I give the floor to the other members of the Council who wish to make statements.

Mr. Rosselli (Uruguay) (*spoke in Spanish*): Groundhog Day. Every year on 2 February, a ritual is celebrated in Punxsutawney, Pennsylvania, in which the groundhog Phil makes a brief appearance, playing an important but limited role in determining whether spring will come early or winter will last another six weeks. On that day in Punxsutawney, the local and international press covers the event widely, but the following day the issue disappears from the news and we hear no more about the charming Phil until the following year. Does anyone here know where Phil is today?

Similarly, every year at the end of April — and only once a year — we carry out a ritual in the Council in which the issue of Western Sahara makes a brief appearance in an open debate that plays an important but limited role in considering solely the renewal of the mandate of the United Nations Mission for the

Referendum in Western Sahara (MINURSO). On this day in New York, the local and international press widely covers this event, but as with Punxsutawney Phil the issue disappears from the news and no one hears anything about it until the following year. Unlike many other situations, the issue of Western Sahara and the Secretary-General's report are never addressed in open briefings of the Council.

Since this is a practice that has been going on for more than two decades, we believe that it is not contingent on the preferences of the elected members of the Council, which are in no position to change this practice during their brief tenures, however much we may attempt to fight similar practices — as my delegation does by insisting on taking the floor regularly before the members in open meetings of the Council.

My delegation therefore decided over the past 12 months that we must not forget the situation to which MINURSO was subject last year. Through other bodies, it has regularly sought information on the state of functionality of the Mission, which was seriously affected by the expulsion of its entire civilian staff in March 2016. Finally, three days ago on Tuesday, 25 April, the Special Representative of the Secretary-General for Western Sahara, Ms Kim Bolduc, orally reported in consultations to the Council that, with the return to Western Sahara of the last 17 officials, the Mission had resumed full functionality.

Let me repeat yet again that peacekeeping missions are established by the Security Council. The mandates determined by the Security Council, as well as status-of-forces and status-of-mission agreements, are binding contracts between the troop-contributing countries and the United Nations. What is more, they are guarantees that protect the personnel that countries voluntarily contribute to peacekeeping missions. It is therefore obvious that these commitments can be altered only by those endowed with the corresponding international legitimacy, which in this case is the Security Council. No Member of the United Nations can unilaterally change these commitments and obligations. The return of the civilian staff to Western Sahara and the resumption of the full functionality of MINURSO are proof of that.

Since 1963, 54 years ago, Western Sahara has been recognized by the United Nations as a non-self-governing Territory in the process of decolonization. We must recall that MINURSO was established with

a mandate to carry out a referendum to determine the final status of the non-self-governing Territory of Western Sahara so that its people can exercise their right to self-determination and choose between independence, association with an independent State or integration into an independent State. We fully support the commitment of the Secretary-General to finding a solution to the question of Western Sahara and his express intention to propose the resumption of the negotiating process with a new impetus and a new spirit.

In that regard, we encourage the parties to take positive steps and to launch a dialogue that will lead to a just and lasting political solution acceptable to all parties and guarantee the free self-determination of the people of Western Sahara. The difficult situation in which the population of Western Sahara finds itself deserves the heightened attention of the international community, and of the Security Council in particular.

Last but not least, my delegation thanks you, Madam President, for guiding the work that led to the adoption of resolution 2351 (2017) at all levels, from the experts in your delegation to the Permanent Representatives. Throughout a number of days of arduous work, we were able to participate directly in finding a solution that, as demonstrated by the unanimous vote, resulted in the successful drafting of the resolution.

Mr. Skau (Sweden): Sweden voted in favour of resolution 2351 (2017) because it represents a real opportunity to resolve one of the most long-standing disputes on the agenda of the United Nations. More importantly it represents an opportunity to address the plight of the people of Western Sahara. With today's adoption, after a year that saw many challenges, we can now turn the page. The resolution contains a number of elements that we believe lay a path towards resolving the issue of the status of Western Sahara.

First, today's resolution sends a strong, clear and unified signal that the time has come to resume negotiations that will lead to a just, lasting and mutually acceptable political solution that will provide for the self-determination of the people of Western Sahara. The resolution provides strong backing to the Secretary-General and his proposal to relaunch the political process with "a new dynamic and a new spirit". We welcome the Secretary-General's direct engagement. This is really diplomacy for peace in action with the Secretary-General using his good offices to engage

actively with the parties and with the full support of the Council. We fully agree with his view that a resumption of the political process is urgently needed. In 2007 and 2008, four rounds of negotiations took place, but little progress was made. Since then, the political process has been at a standstill, despite the efforts of successive Secretaries-General and Personal Envoys, to whom we pay tribute.

Secondly, the resolution encourages a new Personal Envoy of the Secretary-General to reinvigorate efforts towards a political solution, and also calls upon the parties and the neighbouring States to fully cooperate with that envoy. We look forward to working together with a new envoy once appointed.

Thirdly, the Council is also calling, for the first time, for the meaningful participation of women in the political process. The participation of women would inject new energy into the political process.

Clearly, the resolution that we have just adopted sends a strong signal to the parties that the time has come to show renewed determination to engage in the political process and for neighbouring States to contribute. As the Secretary-General states in his report (S/2017/307), difficult decisions will be required from all of us if the current framework of negotiations is to achieve results. While we all hope that these will be forthcoming, our patience cannot last forever, and the Secretary-General has noted that appropriate conclusions must be drawn in the case of absence of progress. In that regard, we note that all possible solutions, including the holding of a referendum, must be kept on the table.

We also supported the resolution because it sent a strong call to the parties that respecting the ceasefire and related agreements is critical, and that violations cannot be accepted. We welcome the fact that the parties have now withdrawn from the buffer strip in Guerguerat, thereby creating an environment conducive to the relaunch of a political process.

With this resolution, the Council also reiterates its full support for the United Nations Mission for the Referendum in Western Sahara (MINURSO), which plays a key role in a complex environment. The Mission has gone through a challenging year, and we welcome its return to full functionality. Equally important, the resolution highlights the plight of Sahrawi refugees, the deteriorating humanitarian situation and the potential risk of reductions in food assistance given a lack of funding. The Sahrawi refugees have lived for more

than 40 years under harsh conditions. This is one of the Organization's oldest protracted refugee operations and the second longest-running refugee situation in the world. The resolution urges the international community to provide new and additional voluntary contributions to the humanitarian response.

We also supported the resolution because it encourages the parties to respect and promote human rights in Western Sahara and in the Tindouf refugee camps. It also strongly encourages enhanced cooperation with the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights, including further visits to the region.

We had many reasons to support the resolution, but that was the easy part. Without any doubt, we now have a lot of work ahead of us. The resolution that we have just adopted offers the best opportunity in a long time to relaunch a political process that has been dormant for almost a decade now. The path towards a mutually acceptable political solution, which will provide for the self-determination of the people of Western Sahara, is now, with the adoption of this resolution, a little closer in sight.

Finally — and like Uruguay — I would like to commend the United States delegation, as penholder, for their extraordinary leadership on this issue, as well as their exemplary efforts in facilitating the negotiations on this resolution.

Mr. Ciss (Senegal) (*spoke in French*): In unanimously adopting resolution 2351 (2017), which extends for an additional 12 months the mandate of the United Nations Mission for the Referendum in Western Sahara (MINURSO), which expired on 30 April, the Security Council continues the constructive role played by the United Nations in the search for a definitive solution to the question of Western Sahara.

We would therefore once again like to thank the Special Representative of the Secretary-General for Western Sahara and Head of MINURSO, as well as the outgoing Personal Envoy of the Secretary-General for Western Sahara. My delegation would also like to hail the leadership demonstrated yet again by the United States delegation in the conduct of the Council's work. We welcome the constructive spirit demonstrated by members of the Council, which ensured that we arrived at a text that nurtures hope for the ongoing political process.

The concerns reiterated in the resolution just adopted are proof of the widely shared determination to tackle challenges in the region and to assist the parties to reach a fair, lasting and mutually acceptable political solution. Furthermore, I would like to highlight and welcome efforts made by the Kingdom of Morocco and by the Secretariat in an ongoing and intense dialogue that facilitated progress on several crucial issues, creating an appropriate framework for negotiations between parties. It is our hope therefore that this cooperation will produce the necessary progress on other key matters, and that cooperation between the Secretariat and other parties concerned could be guided by the same spirit of practicality and reconciliation.

I would also like to welcome the intention expressed by Secretary-General Guterres to relaunch the negotiating process, breathing new dynamism into it. In that context, Senegal would like to reiterate its belief that the initiative for autonomy proposed by Morocco in 2007 is a serious, credible and realistic matter for negotiation. We think that initiative should be taken into account as negotiations resume between the parties, with a view to reaching a fair, lasting and mutually acceptable political solution, as I said earlier, in accordance with the Charter of the United Nations.

Mr. Alemu (Ethiopia): I wish to thank our colleagues from the United States for the serious efforts they made to ensure consensus was reached on resolution 2351 (2017). We appreciate the readiness they have demonstrated to accommodate all legitimate concerns.

We have all been following developments that have unfolded over the past several months surrounding the issue of Western Sahara, as well as the undeniable progress — although fledgling — that we had begun to see. We would have been even more pleased if the points we had raised, which did not amount to more than minor tweaking, had been taken on board. They were not, and we understand why not. Our effort was designed to ensure alignment with fundamental principles in the position of the African Union. All the same, we decided to vote in favour of the resolution because of our conviction that the Secretary-General appears to be committed to relaunch the peace process, and of our hope that there is a new spirit. Of course we also felt we needed to take into account the effort that has been made by the presidency to achieve the progress we saw.

That said, however, we would like to reiterate the importance of the restoration of the full functionality of the United Nations Mission for the Referendum in Western Sahara (MINURSO), whose role has become all the more significant in light of developments on the ground. We welcome the progress made in facilitating the return of the civilian component of MINURSO.

We are very pleased at the progress made surrounding the programme created in connection with the buffer zone. This should create a positive atmosphere for the relaunching of the peace process and de-escalate the tension. Both parties, with which we are equally friendly, should be called upon to honour their commitments to the agreement reached with MINURSO in relation to the ceasefire. They should refrain from taking any action that could undermine their agreement and further aggravate the situation on the ground.

The latest developments have underscored the need to exert renewed efforts for the resumption of talks between the parties to find a just, lasting and mutually acceptable political solution to the long-standing issue on the basis of the relevant Security Council resolutions. This is something that we have always supported based on our conviction that it would provide for the self-determination of the people of Western Sahara in the context of arrangements consistent with the principles and purposes of the Charter of the United Nations.

In this connection, it is imperative that the Council understand the context of the problem we have been facing and fully support the proposal by Secretary-General António Guterres to relaunch the peace process with a new spirit and dynamism to achieve a mutually acceptable political solution to the Western Saharan issue, in accordance with all relevant Security Council resolutions. Any meaningful progress on the peace process hinges on the full cooperation of the two parties with the Secretary-General, and it is only appropriate that the Council call on the parties to commit themselves to resuming the fifth round of negotiations in good faith and without any conditions.

We believe that the appointment of a new Personal Envoy of the Secretary-General for Western Sahara who commands the trust and confidence of both parties will be very critical to realizing that objective. It would be remiss of us to fail to take this opportunity to thank, following the presidency, Personal Envoy Mr. Christopher Ross for having been such an upright

person in whom we can repose confidence. We wish to thank him for his service. We feel this is fair and proper.

We hope that the resumption of direct and serious talks between the parties without preconditions — what the African Union has been calling for and has fully supported now that Morocco has returned to the African Union family, which is a very important development which we welcome — might facilitate speeding up the process of finding an amicable solution to this long-standing dispute and that the African Union will have a supportive role in the United Nations-sponsored peace talks.

Mr. Zhang Dianbin (China) (*spoke in Chinese*): Western Sahara is currently facing a complicated situation. What is urgent now is to maintain stability in the region and create a favourable condition for relaunching the political process.

The Security Council has just adopted resolution 2351 (2017), renewing the mandate of the United Nations Mission for the Referendum in Western Sahara (MINURSO) for one year and calling for the resumption of talks and the political process. This shows the determination of the Council to push for a political solution of the issue and adhere to the Mission's mandate.

On the issue of Western Sahara, China has always held an objective and impartial position. We encourage both parties, on the basis of relevant Council resolutions, to seek a negotiated solution that is just, lasting and mutually acceptable to both parties. We shall continue to support the United Nations in its effort to find a political solution of the issue of Western Sahara and we hope that MINURSO will continue to play an important role in implementing Security Council resolutions and stabilizing the situation in Western Sahara.

Mr. Delattre (France) (*spoke in French*): France welcomes the unanimous adoption of resolution 2351 (2017) and is happy to see that the Council has found unity on this matter. We thank the United States for its efforts as penholder, which helped bring the members of the Security Council together.

The text we have adopted today has extended the mandate of the United Nations Mission for the Referendum in Western Sahara (MINURSO) for one year. I would like to pay tribute to the excellent work that MINURSO undertakes in an unstable security context. As soon as it is fully functional again, which

we welcome, it is important that it have the necessary resources to tackle the challenges on the ground.

The negotiations also served to resolve the crisis in Guerguerat following the withdrawal of the Polisario Front, which has just been confirmed by MINURSO. The joint efforts of the Secretary-General, who called for a withdrawal from the buffer strip on 25 February, and of the Council have produced desired results. We are pleased about the fact that we can turn the page on this crisis. It is important that the ceasefire be upheld now in all circumstances and in a lasting manner.

I take this opportunity to thank the Personal Envoy Mr. Christopher Ross for his engagement and efforts.

Finally, the resolution clearly demonstrates the importance of relaunching the political process. The Council's support for the resumption of the political process was unambiguously expressed in terms of a new positive dynamism, which is already visible thanks to the Secretary-General, whose personal dedication I would like to pay tribute to once again. His outstanding report (S/2017/307) has set the tone. The goal of a fair, lasting and mutually acceptable political solution — one which is guided by the United Nations and is in line with relevant Security Council resolutions — is not unattainable. The role of neighbouring countries will be crucial, as emphasized by this resolution.

France continues to see the autonomy initiative presented by Morocco in 2007 as a credible and serious basis for a negotiated solution. The resolution of the conflict will allow for a return of security, stability and economic prosperity in the region. We reiterate our full support for the work of the United Nations and MINURSO. It is France's hope that the unanimous adoption of the resolution will allow us to be resolutely forward looking in order to promote the current political trends and begin together a new chapter in the history of the region that would benefit everyone.

Mr. Wilson (United Kingdom): The United Kingdom welcomes the adoption of resolution 2351 (2017), which renews the mandate of the United Nations Mission for the Referendum in Western Sahara (MINURSO) and provides clear direction for the crucial work of MINURSO over the next 12 months. I particularly want to thank the United States for its hard work on the text of the resolution and my fellow Council members for the positive and constructive spirit in which negotiations took place this year.

Today's forward-looking resolution marks an important step in the path towards finding a solution to this decades-old conflict. Through this unanimous adoption, we have demonstrated the support within the Chamber for the vital mission of MINURSO. I especially welcome the strong commitment and support of the Secretary-General to relaunch the negotiating process with the aim of reaching a mutually acceptable political solution. I hope his personal involvement and the swift appointment of a new personal envoy will encourage all parties to cooperate fully with the United Nations over the next 12 months to achieve real progress. I also want to take this opportunity to thank Christopher Ross for his tireless commitment over the past eight years and for his endless search for a solution to this problem.

In conclusion, it is clear that this issue can be resolved only if progress is made on the political track. The Council has an important role to play in supporting MINURSO, the Secretary-General and his Personal Envoy. Today's resolution is an important tool in support of the negotiation process and the efforts to achieve a mutually acceptable political solution. The United Kingdom, as ever, stands ready to support both parties in their efforts to achieve that goal.

Mr. Cardi (Italy): We are pleased with today's unanimous adoption of resolution 2351 (2017), which ensures that the United Nations Mission for the Referendum in Western Sahara will continue to fulfil its critical mandate in an increasingly complex and challenging operational environment. I would also like to thank the United States for its excellent presidency of the Security Council this month and its efforts to facilitate the complex negotiations on the resolution, and all Security Council members for the constructive and forward-looking approach that has led to today's consensus decision.

The news that the remaining elements of the Frente Polisario withdrew today from the buffer strip in Guerguerat is important because it fulfils the Secretary-General's request. The latest developments on the ground are also proof of the results that can be achieved with persistent diplomacy on the part of the Council. We encourage the parties to continue upholding their commitment to the ceasefire agreement.

Italy is hopeful that the improvements in the situation on the ground and today's resolution will help to build the required momentum towards a rapid resumption of the political process. We believe this is a critical moment

for Western Sahara that presents an opportunity to fulfil the Secretary-General's objective — indeed, our objective — of revitalizing the political track with a new dynamic and a new spirit in order to reach a just, lasting and mutually acceptable political solution that can provide for the self-determination of the people of Western Sahara.

With today's resolution the Security Council affirms that it shares that vision and fully supports this urgent task. We therefore invite the parties to engage as soon as possible, without preconditions and in a spirit of compromise, in a new round of talks under the auspices of the Secretary-General and facilitated by the new Personal Envoy. At the same time, I would like to salute the outgoing Personal Envoy, Mr. Christopher Ross, and to thank him for his tireless efforts and personal commitment to the issue.

Mr. Llorentty Soliz (Plurinational State of Bolivia) (*spoke in Spanish*): The Plurinational State of Bolivia voted in favour of resolution 2351 (2017) because we believe that the parties will resume the political process with the goal of achieving a just, lasting and mutually acceptable political solution that accords with the purposes and principles of the Charter of the United Nations and the relevant resolutions of the General Assembly and the Security Council. In that regard, we would like to express our commitment to ensuring that the efforts to enable the people of Western Sahara to achieve self-determination continue. The Plurinational State of Bolivia also underscores its support to the efforts of the Secretary-General and his new Personal Envoy to arrive at a political solution that is mutually acceptable to the parties. We commend the decisions of the Kingdom of Morocco and the Frente Polisario to withdraw from the Guergerat area, representing a clear expression of good will by both sides. We also reaffirm our support for the work being done by the United Nations Mission on the Referendum in Western Sahara.

Bolivia is a member of the Decolonization Committee and has strong ties of friendship with the people of Morocco and of the Sahara. We firmly believe that the only way that the peoples of the world can resolve any dispute is through dialogue, which is why we categorically reject any violent approach. We will continue to focus our efforts so that the Members of the United Nations ensure respect for the Charter of the United Nations and for the conduct of relations among States based on respect for the principles of equal rights and a people's right to self-determination.

In conclusion, I would like to thank the presidency for the conduct of the negotiations on today's resolution, which in our view were transparent, flexible and adapted to the situation on the ground. That flexibility enabled us to adopt the resolution unanimously, and that is due primarily to the way that the presidency, particularly as the penholder, moved the process forward. We are also grateful to your delegation and its experts, Madam President, for the political coordination, and to your country's Permanent Representative for their efforts in presiding over the Council this month.

Mr. Kawamura (Japan): I would like to express my sincere appreciation to the United States delegation for its effective guidance of the consultations on today's important adoption of resolution 2351 (2017). Japan also appreciates the Secretary-General's efforts to solve the Guergerat crisis and create an environment conducive to a resumption of the political process.

Japan voted in favor of the resolution extending the mandate of the United Nations Mission for the Referendum in Western Sahara (MINURSO) for another year in recognition of its important role in monitoring the ceasefire that contributes to the region's peace and stability. As we mentioned during the Council's 6 April debate on peacekeeping (see S/PV.7918), we are eager to improve the effectiveness of peacekeeping. We need to assess whether the continued deployment of a given peacekeeping operation fits the reality on the ground and also hold deeper discussions in the Council in order to link political processes to mandates. MINURSO is an illustration of both of those points. We must pay more serious attention to the Mission's effectiveness and to reinvigorating the political process. We very much hope that today's resolution will play an important role in relaunching the political process.

Mr. Yelchenko (Ukraine): Ukraine voted in favour of resolution 2351 (2017), which extends the mandate of the United Nations Mission for the Referendum in Western Sahara (MINURSO) for another year. While we realize that the resolution does not address all the concerns of some Security Council members, we would like to thank the United States delegation, as its penholder, and other colleagues for their dedicated work on it. We see the document as an effort by the Council to revive the political process on the issue of Western Sahara. At the same time, it is also a call to the parties to rise to their shared responsibility for the future of the region and its people. From now on, we urge them

to refrain from any actions that may undermine the ceasefire agreement.

It is urgent that the political process be relaunched without preconditions and in good faith. That cannot be achieved without giving full cooperation and assistance to the Personal Envoy of the Secretary-General and MINURSO. Since Mr. Ross is with us today, this is a good moment to pay tribute to his dedicated efforts over the years. I want to stress that finding a just and lasting solution to the issue of Western Sahara can be achieved only through a genuine and comprehensive dialogue that can pave the way to making a settlement happen. There can be no more excuses for any delay in taking that path.

Mr. Iliichev (Russian Federation) (*spoke in Russian*): The Russian delegation voted in favour of resolution 2351 (2017), which extends the mandate of the United Nations Mission for the Referendum in Western Sahara. The Security Council's unified position should serve to send to the sides in the Western Sahara conflict a very strong signal with regard to the need to begin to swiftly move towards resuming direct talks between Morocco and the Polisario Front.

It is our view that overcoming antagonism and achieving a fair and lasting solution is possible only through political means in accordance with the relevant resolutions of the Security Council.

The final formula must be acceptable to Morocco as well as to the Polisario, and it must provide for the self-determination of the peoples of Western Sahara in the framework of the procedures in accordance with the purposes and principles of the Charter of the United

Nations. In that context, we think it is important that the new Personal Envoy of the Secretary-General for Western Sahara do his utmost to resume the political process.

In conclusion, allow me to underscore that the persistent conflict in Western Sahara plays into the hands of various extremist forces, which in turn has an adverse impact on the military and political situation in the entire region.

The President There are no more names inscribed on the list of speakers.

Before adjourning the meeting, as this is the last scheduled meeting of the Security Council for the month of April, I would like to express the sincere and heartfelt appreciation of a delegation of the United States to the members of the Council, especially our colleagues the Permanent Representatives and Deputy Permanent Representatives and their excellent teams, as well as to the hard-working secretariat of the Council, for all the support they have given to us this month. It has been a busy month, and one in which we rallied to consensus on several important issues within our purview. We could not have done it without the hard work and contributions of Council members and the representatives of the Secretariat, as well as the support of Conference Service Officers and, especially, the support of our interpreters. As we end our presidency, I know I speak on behalf of the Council in wishing the delegation of Uruguay the best of luck in the month of May.

The meeting rose at 7.05 p.m.